SAVE BIG ON HEATING BILLS P. 38

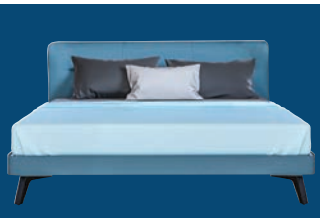
BEST TIRES FOR SLIPPERY ROADS

CR Consumer Reports®

DECEMBER 2022

300+ PRODUCTS RATED & REVIEWED

OUR TOP PICKS OF 2022



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Your Insights Drive Change

I OFTEN GET ASKED how CR decides what to test, what to write about, or what corporate overreaches to investigate. Well, one way we keep our finger on the pulse of the consumer marketplace is by asking consumers. Every year we survey more than 1 million, including through our American Experiences Surveys.

The insights we gain help us put consumers first in a marketplace that too often makes it challenging for them to choose wisely. They give us a window into new trends that may be emerging, some promising and some more troublesome. For example, in one of our recent nationally representative surveys, only 35 percent of Americans said they could trust that the products and services they buy will not cause physical harm. That's alarming. And nearly two-thirds said the federal government does too little to protect consumers today.

A way to rebuild trust is by holding companies and our government accountable, but CR's survey found that about half of Americans believe internet service providers are "hardly ever" or "never" held accountable for unfair consumer practices. And these perceptions are reinforced by headlines about issues like toxic chemicals being found in our water, and the seemingly endless drumbeat of product recall announcements.

As we look to the year ahead, we'll work hard to bring you the information you need to choose the best products for your home (see page 24), drive the safest, most reliable cars, and make consequential decisions about your health—whether you're looking at Medicare options or seeking ways to save money on prescription drugs (see page 46).

It will take all of us to rebuild the trust we deserve in the marketplace. We look forward to amplifying your voices, working with and for you to demand a marketplace that's fair, just, and safe for all.

Marta Tellado

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Seeking Free Credit Reports

Credit scores can make or break your financial future, potentially determining whether, for example, you can land an affordable home or auto loan. And they're frequently used by employers to evaluate job applicants, by landlords to screen prospective tenants, and by insurance companies to price their policies.

So the ramifications can be enormous if credit reports—the collections of raw credit information on which credit scores are based—aren't accurate. In fact, when CR asked consumers to review their credit reports in 2021, about a third of the almost 6,000 volunteers reported finding errors. (While this wasn't a nationally representative sample, the findings were comparable to earlier studies by other organizations.)

The best way to ensure that your credit reports are accurate is to check them frequently. That has been relatively easy since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the three big reporting agencies (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion) began offering weekly free access. The program was scheduled to end Jan. 1 when they planned to revert to the earlier policy of one free report per year, as required by federal law.

In September, CR advocates objected, arguing that we should always have free access to our own credit reports. A week later, the agencies reversed course, extending free weekly reports through 2023. Now CR will push to make free access permanent and for agencies to do more to ensure that reports are accurate.

You can help by signing our petition at **CR.org/freereports**. And at **CR.org/crediterrors** you can learn how to fix a credit reporting error if you find one.

34%

of the volunteers who checked their credit reports for CR's Credit Checkup project found at least one error.

Source: Consumer Reports Credit Checkup project

UPDATE ON PFAS

For more than 15 years, CR has sounded the alarm about PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), a class of chemicals found in many water- and greaseproof products and linked to a long list of health problems, including low birth weights and increased risk of some cancers. In August, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed designating two common PFAS as hazardous substances under the Superfund law. It's a historic move that will hold companies that pollute the environment with PFAS accountable and facilitate the cleanup of many affected communities.

Cleaning Up Car Sales

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Auto dealers have long had a reputation for shady business practices, and not without reason. The Federal Trade Commission gets more than 100,000 consumer complaints per year related to automobiles, many of them citing bait-and-switch marketing, bogus or surprise fees, and other deceptive sales tactics. And recent inventory shortages "seem to have emboldened many dealers to be even more brazen," says Chuck Bell, CR's financial services policy director.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR has for more than a decade been urging policymakers to do more to prevent deceptive auto sales tactics. In July, the FTC took an important step, proposing rules that would, among other things, require dealers to disclose the full price a consumer will have to pay for a car; prohibit dealers from forcing buyers to accept expensive add-on features, such as "gap insurance"; and make it illegal to advertise unavailable vehicles or discounts.

In September, CR joined a coalition of more than 100 public interest organizations calling on the FTC to issue the proposed rules. CR also submitted more than 200 stories of auto dealer abuse that we collected recently from our members. And as further evidence that stronger consumer protections are needed, we cited a 2021 CR investigation demonstrating that car dealers frequently overcharge consumers for auto loans.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Learn how to protect yourself from deceptive auto sales practices, at **CR.org/carbuyingtips**.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RITTER

Our October 2022 article **"Watch What You Really Want for Less"** offered ways to save on TV streaming services like Amazon Prime, Hulu, and Netflix. Our readers shared their own thoughts, too. To add your voice, go to **CR.org/saveonstreaming**.

I LIKED THE article, especially the breakdown of services and prices. One element missing was the cost of internet service itself, particularly for a stand-alone internet package without cable vs. an internet and cable bundle—which can play a significant role in the total bill.
—Kathryn Price, Nashville, TN

EDITOR'S NOTE *Moving from cable TV to streaming does require a decent internet connection. Several things will affect price, including where you live and whether there's competition in your area. The cost of internet service can go up if you separate it from TV service. Try negotiating with your provider; as cable companies lose TV business to cord-cutters, they appear to be more willing to deal to keep their internet customers. Ask about a lower-cost plan—it may not be advertised. Providers may have plans specifically for lower-income older adults. Also, a new Affordable Connectivity Program administered by the Federal Communications Commission provides up to a $30-a-month discount for eligible households; find out more at fcc.gov/acp. Finally, there are some alternative types of internet service, such as fixed wireless or 5G, that might work for you. T-Mobile, for example, is now offering a 5G home internet service for $50 a month, with typical speeds from 33 to 182 Mbps. You can go to t-mobile.com/home-internet/eligibility to see if it's available in your area.*

YOUR ARTICLE MISSED out on one way to save. My library lends Roku devices preloaded with streaming services like Amazon, Netflix, HBO, BritBox, Hulu, ESPN, Disney+, and more free of charge. We binge what we want and enjoy what our tax dollars provide.
—Christian Schelthoff, Lisle, IL

ONE OF THE reasons we've kept cable is because we really like having a DVR. We record almost everything we watch on our cable channels and then skip the commercials on playback. Your article mentioned that some streaming services offer a "cloud DVR." How do those work, and can you skip the commercials?
—Kaye McSpadden, Indianapolis, IN

EDITOR'S NOTE *Cloud DVRs work like traditional cable DVRs except the programs are stored "in the cloud," or on internet servers, instead of on a hard drive in your cable box. Some allow you to skip at least some commercials, typically by fast forwarding, but you'll need to check each service—and the streaming device you're using—to see to what degree. Some services, such as Philo, mark the commercials so you can skip over them with the press of a button.*

WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

LONG-COVID TREATMENTS

IN REGARD TO your excellent October article "CR's Long-COVID Recovery Guide": My wife got hit with the long-haul version of the disease in March of 2020 and had to deal with it for 14 awful months. She found a terrific acupuncturist who was instrumental in her recovery and who is now involved in treating long-COVID sufferers at a major hospital.
—Stephen Herz, Windsor, NY

EDITOR'S NOTE *People with long COVID-19 often become their own best advocates in finding relief. Treatment guidelines from the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation say that although there's no direct evidence to support the use of acupuncture in treating*

the condition, many patients have said it improves symptoms of fatigue. Some preliminary evidence indicates acupuncture may be helpful for other post-viral conditions similar to long COVID.

SAFEST AUTO BRANDS

FOR YEARS CR has praised Subaru for its driver safety features. Yet in "The Safety Features You Want Right Now" in the October issue, Subaru is noticeably absent. The Subarus we have owned over the years, with all their safety features, have helped us avoid three serious accidents.
–William Wilbur, Portal, AZ

EDITOR'S NOTE *While Subaru does offer important safety features on nearly all of its vehicles, they aren't always standard equipment on every trim. Only one Subaru model has blind spot warning as standard, and about half of Subaru models lack standard automatic emergency braking. The brands we highlighted had the most models with these features as standard equipment.*

COOKING OIL OPTIONS

YOUR OCTOBER ARTICLE "The New World of Cooking Oils" was highly informative. However, no mention was made of the widely used corn oil or peanut oil. Any reason?
–Michael Rae, Potomac, MD

EDITOR'S NOTE *Unfortunately, we couldn't include every type of oil. But peanut and corn oils are good choices for high-heat cooking and have a neutral flavor. Nutritionally, peanut oil is high in monounsaturated fats, while corn oil is rich in polyunsaturated fats.*

CAR PRICE QUESTIONS

ON PAGE 53 of the October issue, you listed a retail price for the Toyota RAV4 Hybrid of about $34,193. Where is this vehicle, as the cheapest ones in my area start at $40,000? Dealers of all makes are now adding $4,000 to $6,000 to MSRPs (the price CR once suggested we negotiate DOWN from).
–Patricia Stiles, Asheville, NC

EDITOR'S NOTE *We list the sticker price and the price we paid. Most car prices are elevated these days, including the popular RAV4, which was selling nationally at about 6 to 9 percent over sticker price at press time. Use the Car Buying & Pricing tab on our car model pages (**CR.org/cars**) to see local transaction prices, and try our Build & Buy Car Buying service to net a fair deal.*

WHERE DOES CANOLA OIL COME FROM?

In "The New World of Cooking Oils" (October 2022) you state that canola oil is good for health. What plant does the canola seed come from? I have never heard of a canola plant.
—Gloria Hupe, Peotone, IL

EDITOR'S NOTE: *There actually is a canola plant. It's part of the Brassica family, which also includes broccoli and kale. Plant breeders in Canada developed it from the rapeseed plant in the 1970s, and that's where the name comes from, a combination of Canada (Can) and oil (ola).*

DIY PAINTING TIPS

GREAT ADVICE IN "Painting Made Easier" in the October issue. I have one more bit of advice: Save your stir stick. On the handle, write the room you painted, the brand of paint, the product number, and the color name. When you need to do a touch-up, you won't have to guess where you bought the paint and what color it is.
–Valerie Nelson, Hopewell Township, NJ

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ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Slow Cookers

WE TESTED: 19 models
WE TEST FOR: The tenderness of meat after slow cooking for 5 hours on high heat or 8 hours on low heat; how easy the model is to use and to clean; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 72
Range: 59-87

MAKES EXCELLENT STEW
Hamilton Beach Temp Tracker 6 Qt. 33866
$82

87 OVERALL SCORE

BIG ENOUGH TO FEED A CROWD
Elite Platinum 8.5 Qt Programmable MST-900D
$70

72 OVERALL SCORE

NICE PRICE
Black + Decker Digital Programmable SCD1007 (7-Qt.)
$62

72 OVERALL SCORE

Stain Remover Sprays

WE TESTED: 6 products
WE TEST FOR: How well a spray removed dirt, coffee, salad dressing, and other tough stains.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 76
Range: 71-86

BEST STAIN REMOVER
OxiClean MaxForce Spray
36¢ per ounce

86 OVERALL SCORE

GOOD VALUE
Shout Triple-Acting Spray
11¢ per ounce

77 OVERALL SCORE

TOPS FOR COFFEE STAINS
Spray 'n Wash Max Spray
25¢ per ounce

74 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

What's the difference between a stain remover spray and laundry detergent?

STAIN REMOVER SPRAYS, like the three shown above, are typically made with the same ingredients often found in your regular liquid laundry detergent bottle: surfactants, enzymes, and polymers, which are cleaning agents and compounds that help remove the soil from clothing. But stain removers are more concentrated, while regular detergents are made to be diluted with lots of water. That said, in past tests we've found that the very best liquid detergents (such as Tide Plus Ultra Stain Release and Persil ProClean Stain Fighter) can rival the stain-removing power of many sprays if you dab some of the detergent directly onto a stain and let it soak for 5 minutes before washing.

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH

POOR — EXCELLENT | CR RECOMMENDED | CR BEST BUY

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org**.

Robotic Vacuums

WE TESTED: 41 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a vacuum cleans carpets and bare floors, including picking up pet hair; how easy (and quiet) it is to use; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 65
Range: 32-83

GREAT ON CARPETS BUT PRICEY
Samsung Jet Bot AI+ VR50T95735W
$1,300

72 OVERALL SCORE

QUIET & RELIABLE
iRobot Roomba i3+ Evo
$500

72 OVERALL SCORE

LOW CLEARANCE (3.3" TALL)
Ecovacs U2 Pro
$350

64 OVERALL SCORE

Over-the-Range Microwaves

WE TESTED: 59 models
WE TEST FOR: Evenness of defrosting and heating of food, ease of use, and more. We also test how well the built-in exhaust fan vents cooking gases.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 66
Range: 46-86

BEST OVERALL
Whirlpool WMH53521HZ
$550

86 OVERALL SCORE

POWERFUL FAN FOR VENTING
LG LMV2031ST
$450

84 OVERALL SCORE

RELIABLE BRAND
Ikea Lagan 704.621.63
$230

81 OVERALL SCORE

Food Processors for Small Kitchens

WE TESTED: 57 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a model chops almonds and onions, shreds carrots, slices celery, grates cheese, purées peas, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 61
Range: 35-81

EXCELLENT AT CHOPPING & VERY QUIET
Cuisinart Pro Classic DLC-10SY (7-Cup)
$130

73 OVERALL SCORE

SUPER AT SHREDDING & GRATING
Ninja Foodi Ultimate System SS401 (9-Cup)
$200

67 OVERALL SCORE

SPACE-SAVING BARGAIN
Hamilton Beach Compact 8-Cup Food Processor & Vegetable Chopper
$40

64 OVERALL SCORE

Umbrella Strollers

WE TESTED: 9 models
WE TEST FOR: Safety of the stroller, including its stability and braking; how well it maneuvers over different terrain; and more.

Models shown are for ages 6 months and up.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 71
Range: 53-74

DEAL ON WHEELS
Summer Infant 3D Lite
$100

74 OVERALL SCORE

LIGHTWEIGHT (11 POUNDS)
Uppababy G-Lite
$150

72 OVERALL SCORE

DOUBLE STROLLER FOR A NICE PRICE
Dream On Me Twin Side by Side
$100

62 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with those of another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Snow Blowers & More

What's the best way to keep indoor plants healthy in winter?

WINTER'S SHORTER DAYS and drier air can mean your plants may require a little extra TLC to thrive. First, you may need to adjust your watering schedule. Most houseplants don't need as much water during the winter months as they do the rest of the year. Instructions for proper watering should be on the care tag that came with your plant. (If that's long gone, you can look up care instructions for free on a website such as Almanac.) But in general you should water the soil only when it's mostly dry. Just stick your finger into it: If it feels dry at a depth of about 2 inches, it's time to water. Still unsure? Invest in a moisture meter (about $11 at Amazon or Walmart), a simple battery-free probe that can sense whether soil is dry, moist, or wet. When you do water your plant, wet the soil thoroughly and let the water drain completely. If the plant sits in a saucer, dump any excess water it collects after an hour to help prevent root rot.

The right environmental conditions are important, too. Most plants thrive best in temperatures of 65° to 75° F by day and 60° to 65° F at night, so keep pots away from heat vents, radiators, and drafty windows. If the air in your home feels dry, consider placing a humidifier near your plants (see CR's top models, on page 15) and setting it to keep the air at between 40 and 50 percent humidity, the optimal level for most houseplants (and humans). Finally, if you don't think your plants are getting enough sunshine during the short winter days, a grow light (about $9 at Amazon, Home Depot, or Walmart) could help with that problem.

Or skip all that extra work in favor of a low-maintenance plant like the sansevieria (aka the snake plant), which grows well in low light, without frequent watering.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at CR.org/askourexperts ... and watch for the answers.

Why is there rust on my stainless steel fridge? I thought that couldn't happen.

DESPITE ITS NAME, stainless steel can rust. This material is actually an iron alloy made of several metals, including chromium, which forms a chromium-oxide layer on its surface. That layer prevents moisture from reaching and corroding the metal beneath it. But if that barrier is scratched or degraded by, for example, a bleach-based cleanser, or by abrasives (such as steel pads or metal brushes), moisture can get in and rust can develop.

Instead, wash stainless steel items using mild soap and a clean cloth, then rinse with a small amount of water and be sure to dry completely. Or try using a dedicated stainless cleaner like Bar Keepers Friend spray, which contains mineral oil to shield the steel's protective layer. These cleansers can also help rub away rust spots that may have already formed. Some manufacturer websites, such as GE's and Kenmore's, also offer specific cleaning instructions for removing rust from their stainless steel appliances.

If I drop food on the kitchen floor, does the '5-second rule' truly apply?

EATING FOOD THAT has been on the floor for less than 5 seconds (a practice known somewhat jokingly as the "5-second rule") is pretty common: In a CR poll on Instagram, 84 percent of participants confessed that they've done it, with most reporting that they limit the practice to food that has fallen on the floors inside their own homes. But the truth is, this just isn't a good rule to live by.

Though a few seconds of floor contact may seem harmless, a 2016 study from Rutgers University in New Jersey found that the transfer of bacteria from a contaminated surface to a piece of food can happen almost instantly. If you wear your shoes indoors, you may be transferring germs from the bottom of your shoes to your kitchen floor every time you walk through the room.

"Even if your kitchen floor appears to be very clean, there may be bacterial or viral hazards–which are invisible to the naked eye–lurking there," says James E. Rogers, PhD, director of food safety research and testing at CR. So it's better not to risk it unless you can wash or peel the food that was dropped on the floor (think apples, blueberries, potatoes, and onions) before eating it, Rogers says.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGE BLOCH

CR Insights

IN THE KNOW

Kitchen Gifts for $25 or Less

These culinary accessories are favorites of our editors and expert chefs.

McEvoy Ranch Extra Virgin Olive Oil, 100 ML $12.50

In past CR taste tests, we've found McEvoy Ranch EVOO to be fresh tasting with green-grassy and ripe fruit flavors. These small bottles come in a variety of flavors, like basil, and have a built-in pour spout.

Marley's Monsters Unpaper Towels $18 for a 6-pack

Our staffers were impressed by just how soft these reusable kitchen towels are. In addition to mopping up spills, Marley's Monsters' colorful cotton flannels can be used as napkins, we suggest.

Kyocera Ceramic Mandoline $25

In an at-home review of 11 mandoline slicers by CR staffers, this one stood out for its performance: It has a single sharp blade on a slim, easy-to-store paddle and slices beautifully.

Turn page to see more kitchen gifts. ▶

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTO: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS

KITCHEN GIFTS FOR $25 OR LESS *Continued*

Bella Extra-Wide/ Self-Centering-Slot 14829 Toaster $20

66
OVERALL SCORE

The Bella toaster has extra-wide slots for bigger rolls and a dedicated bagel setting. Our testers found that it toasts nicely and is easy to use.

Victoria Pre-Seasoned Cast Iron Skillet $20

74
OVERALL SCORE

A smart gift for steak lovers, this cast-iron pan was super at browning and searing foods in our tests. Plus, it comes with a limited lifetime warranty.

Microplane Soft-Handle Zester, 12" $16

Ideal for grating hard cheeses and zesting citrus, this product will really last. "I've used one for over a decade, and it's still sharp!" says CR's culinary expert, Paul Hope.

Victorinox Oyster Knife, 3-inch, Boston Style $19

An oyster knife may not sound like a kitchen staple, but chef Ji Hye Kim of the restaurant Miss Kim loves its versatility: "I also use it to peel ginger or seed squash."

Original Gorilla Grip Cutting Boards, set of three $24

In our review of six cutting boards, this dishwasher-safe set was among the most stable. "They give a bit of grip and feel great under your knife," says CR's Paul Hope.

Greater Goods Digital Food Kitchen Scale $14

Jesse Szewczyk, a food stylist and cookbook author, loves using this scale. "Weighing ingredients ensures that baked goods come out perfect every time," he says.

Nordic Ware Naturals Baker's Half Sheet $18

88
OVERALL SCORE

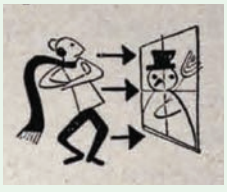
This aluminum sheet pan is a go-to for nicely baked cookies. It also resisted warping when heated and rated Excellent in our durability lab tests.

PHOTOS, BOTTOM, FROM LEFT: CONSUMER REPORTS; POLARTEC; HARRY LANGDON/GETTY IMAGES; CONSUMER REPORTS; GLERUPS

CR Time Traveler WINTER WARMERS

1938 CR says to avoid suede gloves, which soil easily and can discolor. Better to buy leather gloves made from durable goatskin (shown).

1943 CR advises that real fur trim on coats, hats, and muffs is more decorative than practical. "A fur scarf doesn't do much to protect from winter gales," we say.



1951 Storm windows reduce heating bills, we report. Prioritize installing windows facing north toward prevailing winds to retain the most heat for your money.

1960 We test 39 electric heaters. None are terrific at heating whole rooms, but some, like this $40 Arvin, are very good at warming a person seated nearby.

POOR — EXCELLENT | CR RECOMMENDED | CR BEST BUY

TECH UPDATE

4 Ways to Keep Your Phone Charged Longer

YOU'RE RUNNING LATE and need to text the friend you're meeting, or you're just about to scan your digital airplane boarding pass and suddenly you realize that you have no phone power left. But there's good news: A few tweaks to your routine can maximize your phone's battery life. Here's how.

› **Adjust your brightness.** A well-lit screen helps with readability, but the brighter the screen, the more battery it uses. Rather than remembering to dim and brighten your phone (found in the Settings menu) in different scenarios, most phones let you select "auto-brightness," which means it will sense the lighting conditions you're in and adjust the screen's brightness up and down automatically. On iPhones, you'll find this setting under "Accessibility." On Androids, you'll typically find it under "Display."

› **Keep your WiFi turned on.** Browsing the web or streaming a video clip over your cellular network can run down your battery pretty quickly. But if you connect to WiFi, performing those same tasks will use less power—so it's always better to join a WiFi network when you can (at home, work, or a cafe, for example). In Settings, you can opt to keep your WiFi turned on, which will automatically join known WiFi networks, or alert you when WiFi is available near you.

› **Make at-home charging easier.** Forgetting to plug your phone in before bed (or not plugging it in properly) can mean waking up the next day to a low battery. For some, it's easier to keep a wireless charging pad, like the Samsung 15W below, on your nightstand because all you'll need to do is put your phone on it—no fussing with cords. In CR's tests, the Samsung stood out for its fast charging.

› **Switch modes when you're running low.** Most phones have a "low power" or "power saver" mode under battery settings. Turning it on will limit or disable some energy-consuming apps and features. But you'll still be able to make and receive calls, texts, and email.

Samsung 15W $80

- 5/5 CHARGING
- 4/5 EASE OF USE
- CHARGING TIME: 2 hours, 30 minutes to a full charge

3 PHONES THAT OFFER SUPERB BATTERY LIFE

Apple iPhone 13 Pro Max $1,100

84 OVERALL SCORE

- BATTERY & CHARGING
- BATTERY LIFE (HOURS) **52.5**
- WIRELESS CHARGING **YES**

Samsung Galaxy A42 5G $400

70 OVERALL SCORE

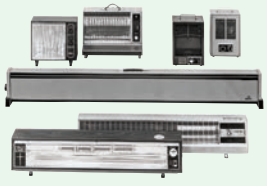
- BATTERY & CHARGING
- BATTERY LIFE (HOURS) **49**
- WIRELESS CHARGING **YES**

OnePlus Nord N200 5G $240

65 OVERALL SCORE

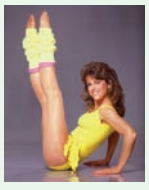
- BATTERY & CHARGING
- BATTERY LIFE (HOURS) **46**
- WIRELESS CHARGING **YES**

PHOTOS, FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BELLA; VICTORIA; MICROPLANE; CONSUMER REPORTS; GREATER GOODS; GORILLA GRIP; VICTORINOX. PHOTOS, THIS PAGE: SAMSUNG; CONSUMER REPORTS



1976 We test heaters again and note that safety has improved. Stable models, such as baseboard heaters, reduce tip-over risks.

1981 Polar fleece—a new synthetic warmth-retaining material—is created by Malden Mills, a textile company, now called Polartec.



1982 In her popular workout tapes, Jane Fonda wears leg warmers to keep her calf muscles toasty, and helps kick off an '80s fashion trend.

1995 To test comforters, CR uses a mannequin wired with temperature sensors to see how warm he stayed under each one. A mid-priced Heirloom comforter takes first place.

2015 We evaluate instant hot chocolate mixes and find tasty, low-cal picks like Swiss Miss Simply Cocoa Milk Chocolate (100 calories).

2022 Got cold feet? After trying eight popular pairs, we recommend these breathable non-itchy wool slippers with a leather sole.

Glerups Shoe With Leather Sole $105

For more clever ways to beat the cold this winter, turn to page 38.

The Home Depot Home Accents Holiday Jackson Noble Fir

HOLIDAY HELPER

The Best Artificial Trees

WONDER HOW POPULAR faux Christmas trees are these days? Eighty-four percent of the trees that were put up in U.S. homes last year were artificial instead of live. And this year there are very good reasons to go faux: Drought conditions in many parts of the U.S. will have an impact on live Christmas tree crop yields this season, according to the American Christmas Tree Association (ACTA). Combine that with inflation, and live trees may be more expensive than last year, up from $78 on average.

Artificial trees cost more than similarly sized live trees–typically a few hundred dollars for one between 5 and 8 feet–but because they can last years, they can be both an economical and sustainable choice. Plus, a manufactured fir with pre-strung lights saves you the time and effort of stringing a live tree–and won't leave a trail of needles behind when the season is over. Our staff bought and evaluated six widely available tree models, assessing how easy they were to assemble and disassemble, how realistic they looked, and the overall quality of any pre-strung lights that came with the tree. Check out our top three finds, at right.

OUR FAVORITE FAKE

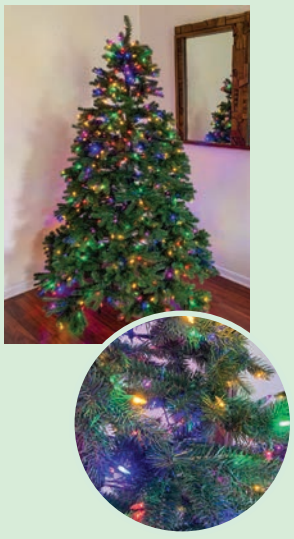
The Home Depot Home Accents Holiday Jackson Noble Fir, 7'5" $299

With three connecting tiers and hinged branches, this tree easily falls into place once assembled and upright. The branches are realistic and full; it has 4,072 branch tips pre-lit with 1,200 microdot LED bulbs, which are well spaced and sophisticated looking, with multicolor and white settings. A foot pedal turns the lights on and off.

A WORTHY SPLURGE

Balsam Hill BH Balsam Fir with Candlelight Clear LEDs, 5'5" $699

Though pricey, we think that this tree's extra-easy setup and full branches (with over 3,373 tips) could be a good investment. Clear, brief instructions were included, as well as protective gloves, to make fluffing up the tree a breeze. The pre-strung static white LED lights were evenly spaced and rarely got tangled during assembly.



THE MOST REALISTIC LOOKING

Red Barrel Studio Newberry Spruce (Wayfair), 8' $632

This tree isn't as easy to set up as the two above, but it's a strikingly realistic option. It does not come with gloves, so we suggest donning some: The branches (with 2,057 tips) were prickly and needed a fair bit of fluffing. Once assembled, we were impressed with this tree's 8-foot height and lights that have lots of color-changing choices (multicolor and white).

For more artificial tree reviews, go to CR.org/fauxtrees.

PHOTOS: ANNA KOCHARIAN/CONSUMER REPORTS; ANGELA LASHBROOK/CONSUMER REPORTS

POOR — EXCELLENT | CR RECOMMENDED | CR BEST BUY

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

HUMIDIFIERS THAT IMPROVE DRY WINTER AIR

AN EFFECTIVE HUMIDIFIER can restore moisture to dry air and consequently dry skin. Generally, the best type to buy are "cool-mist" models, which emit cold moist air that helps to shrink the swelling of your nasal passages. That makes it easier for you to breathe, particularly when you have a cold. (Warm mist, on the other hand, can cause your nasal passages to swell.)

In our lab tests, the top cool-mist models, shown here, are superior at pumping out moisture—shown by our "output" score. Many are also easy to clean (noted in our "convenience" score), which is important because our safety experts recommend that you rinse yours daily and deep clean it weekly.

SMALL ROOM
26 to 299 sq. ft.

Babymoov Hygro *(shown above)* $80

95 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 OUTPUT
- 5/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

Levoit Dual 200S Smart $55

93 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 OUTPUT
- 4/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

Vicks VUL525 $40

91 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 OUTPUT
- 5/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

MEDIUM ROOM
300 to 499 sq. ft.

Honeywell HUL430 $75

92 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 OUTPUT
- 5/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

TaoTronics TT_AH001 $50

91 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 OUTPUT
- 4/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

Pureguardian H3200WAR $120

88 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 OUTPUT
- 5/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

LARGE ROOM
500 to 999 sq. ft.

Lasko UH300* $75

80 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 OUTPUT
- 4/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

SPT SU-4010* $90

79 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 OUTPUT
- 4/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

Everlasting Comfort Ultrasonic $67

73 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 OUTPUT
- 4/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

Three to Skip

SMALL ROOM

HoMedics TotalComfort UHE-WB01 $25

28 OVERALL SCORE

- 1/5 OUTPUT
- 5/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 4/5 EFFICIENCY

MEDIUM ROOM

Objecto H4 Hybrid $170

28 OVERALL SCORE

- 1/5 OUTPUT
- 5/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 3/5 EFFICIENCY

LARGE ROOM

Stadler Form Eva E-001 $200

29 OVERALL SCORE

- 1/5 OUTPUT
- 4/5 CONVENIENCE
- 5/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

PHOTO, TOP: BABYMOOV

*These are dual-mist models, which can provide warm mist in addition to cool mist.

For even more ratings of humidifiers, our Digital and All Access members can go to CR.org/humidifiers.

FOOD IQ™

Are These Crackers Good for You?

WHOLE GRAINS! FIGS AND CRANBERRIES! FLAX AND PUMPKIN SEEDS! The crackers on store shelves sure do look a lot healthier than they used to. And some truly are good for you. Others, not so much.

"The cracker aisle can be very confusing," says Amy Keating, RD, a CR nutritionist. And while there's nothing wrong with the occasional crunchy indulgence, if you're looking for something that's tasty and nutritious, here are a few important cracker truths.

ALL WHOLE-GRAIN CRACKERS ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL

You may know that 100 percent whole-grain crackers have more fiber than ones made from refined wheat (white) flour. But some crackers include added sugars and sodium. Wheat Thins made with whole-grain wheat flour, for example, contain a full teaspoon of added sugars and 200 mg of sodium per 16 crackers (1 ounce). A better choice? The Triscuit box below.

Triscuit Hint of Sea Salt

Serving size: 6 crackers

CALORIES **120**	
FAT **3.5 g**	SAT FAT **0 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**	FIBER **3 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**	SODIUM **50 mg**

ADDED FRUIT ISN'T ALWAYS HEALTHIER

Those toasted fruit crisps, with or without nuts and seeds, may look whole grain because they're brown, but many are made with white flour. Some contain added sugars too—as much as 1.5 teaspoons per serving. Look for ones like the Raincoast Crisps below, made with whole-grain oat flour and fewer added sugars.

Raincoast Crisps Oat and Cranberry

Serving size: 4 crackers

CALORIES **90**	
FAT **3.5 g**	SAT FAT **0.5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **2 g**	FIBER **2 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**	SODIUM **140 mg**

WHAT GLUTEN FREE REALLY GETS YOU

These often list ingredients that don't contain gluten, like tapioca, potato, or cassava, instead of wheat flour. Tapioca and potato starches don't offer much nutrition; they contain 0 grams of fiber. Better choices are made with nut flour or non-wheat-whole grains, like the crackers below, which are made with brown rice and corn.

CrunchMaster Multi-Grain Sea Salt

Serving size: 15 crackers

CALORIES **120**	
FAT **3.5 g**	SAT FAT **0.5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **1 g**	FIBER **2 g**
PROTEIN **2 g**	SODIUM **150 mg**

CRACKERS WITH SEEDS ARE A SMART PICK

We aren't really talking about those sprinkled with sesame or poppy seeds. Look for crackers made from mostly or all seeds—think flax, sunflower, pumpkin, and more. "These supply healthy fats, fiber, and protein," says Keating. They also tend to be gluten free. Look for crackers made with whole grains, or grain-free seed-only ones like the Top Seedz below.

Top Seedz 6 Seed Crackers

Serving size: 6 crackers

CALORIES **170**	
FAT **14 g**	SAT FAT **1.5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**	FIBER **3 g**
PROTEIN **4 g**	SODIUM **90 mg**

PHOTO: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS

Note: All the serving sizes are 1 ounce, except for Raincoast Crisps, which are half an ounce.

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

TESLA VEHICLES

Tesla is recalling 1,096,762 Model 3, Model S, Model X, and Model Y vehicles to ensure their power windows meet safety standards. Currently, their windows may continue to close even if there's an obstruction in the way, which may cause injuries. The recalled vehicles include 2017-2022 Tesla Model 3 sedans manufactured between July 2, 2017, and Sept. 14, 2022; 2021-2022 Tesla Model S sedans manufactured between Jan. 19, 2021, and Sept. 16, 2022; 2021-2022 Tesla Model X SUVs manufactured between Feb. 12, 2021, and Sept. 16, 2022; and 2020-2022 Tesla Model Y SUVs manufactured between Nov. 26, 2019, and Sept. 14, 2022.
What to do: Tesla is sending out an over-the-air software update to affected vehicles free of charge, and the update should occur without owners needing to take action. In addition to the OTA software update, Tesla will notify owners of affected vehicles by mail starting on Nov. 15, 2022. But if you would like to contact the manufacturer, owners can call Tesla at 877-798-3752.

AGIT GLOBAL PADDLES

Agit Global is recalling about 124,000 paddles sold with stand-up paddleboards because the paddle can suddenly break mid-shaft into two pieces during use, exposing sharp edges and posing a risk of serious injury. The paddles were sold at Costco, Home Depot, REI, Sam's Club, and small surf/sporting goods stores nationwide, and online at Amazon, shop.agit-global.com, and walmart.com from January 2015 through December 2020 for $180 to $480.
What to do: Stop using the paddles. Contact Agit Global at 877-862-0622 or go to agit-global.com/content/important-safety-recall for details and to get a free zippered paddle shaft sleeve intended to cover the paddle shaft when in use.

HEARING LAB TECHNOLOGY HEARMUFFS EARMUFFS

Hearing Lab Technology/Lucid Audio is recalling about 31,150 children's HearMuffs sound compression earmuffs because the included AAA alkaline batteries can rupture, posing hearing, projectile, and/or burn injury. The HearMuffs were sold at Kroger, Sam's Club, and other stores nationwide and online at kroger.com and samsclub.com from January 2018 through December 2021 for $30 to $40.
What to do: Call 833-408-0479 or go to lucidaudio.com and click on "Recall" for details and to get two new replacement AAA batteries free of charge.

HUFFY BLUE'S CLUES RIDE-ON TOYS

Huffy is recalling about 28,550 Blue's Clues Foot to Floor Ride-on toys because the toy can tip forward when a child is riding on it, posing fall and injury hazards. The toys were sold at Walmart stores nationwide and online at walmart.com from August 2021 through July 2022 for about $40.
What to do: Take the toy away from children and stop using it. Call Huffy at 800-872-2453 or go to huffybikes.com/recalls for details and to get a free kit to install a new stop bar on the toy.

ACCOMPANY USA CERAMIC MUGS

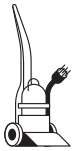
Accompany USA is recalling about 25,000 ceramic mugs with cork bottoms because the cup can crack or break when hot liquid is poured into it, posing a burn hazard. The mugs were sold online at accompanyusa.com, admartproducts.com, infinityiwc.square.site, logomark.com, nccustom.com/brand/lanco, and vision1usa.com from February 2022 through August 2022 for about $2.
What to do: Stop using the mug. Contact Accompany USA at 909-595-0178 or go to accompanyusa.com and click on "Recalls" for details and to receive a full refund.

ROOTS & HARVEST CANNING JARS

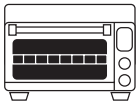
Roots & Harvest is recalling about 15,900 wide-mouth pint canning jars because pieces of glass can be found in some of the recalled jars, posing a laceration hazard. The jars were sold at Orscheln Farm & Home stores in the Midwest region during July 2022 for about $17.
What to do: Stop using the jars. Contact LEM (the importing company) at 877-536-7763 or go to rootsandharvest.com and click on "Product Recalls" for details and to receive a full refund. LEM will provide a prepaid return label and return shipping container free of charge.

DECEMBER IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

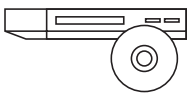
CARPET CLEANERS



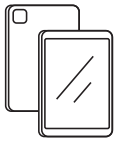
TOASTERS



BLU-RAY PLAYERS



TABLETS



PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

Get a Great Laptop for Less

How to cut through the jargon—and avoid spending more than you need to.

by Nicholas De Leon

BUDGET PICK

LENOVO IDEAPAD 1 15
$600

70 OVERALL SCORE

FOR APPLE USERS

MACBOOK AIR (2022)
$1,200

81 OVERALL SCORE

HIGHLY PORTABLE

MICROSOFT SURFACE GO 3
$730

56 OVERALL SCORE

WITH SO MANY highly rated laptops available nowadays, you might say that we're spoiled—consumers have more choices than ever. Too many, perhaps.

Whether your budget is $700 or $1,200, popular brands like Apple, Dell, HP, and LG probably have a laptop with your name on it. With so many good options, finding the right one can feel challenging. But it doesn't have to be.

The first step is to decide what you'll be doing with your laptop. For most of us, that list might include reading the news, watching Netflix videos, paying bills, and keeping up with friends through Facebook, email, and Zoom calls. You don't need a particularly powerful computer to do those things. In fact, any recommended laptop in our ratings is capable of satisfying those needs.

It's also important to think about where you'll use your new computer. If it's going to be a companion on weekend getaways or trips to a favorite cafe, you might want a small, lightweight model. But if your laptop will mostly be homebound, a larger model could be better. It might be less convenient to carry, but the larger screen and bigger keyboard will be more pleasant to use.

As you shop, these relatively simple choices can start to seem complicated because you have to navigate technical details such as a laptop's memory, storage, and processor (all covered below). You might also be concerned about security to protect against digital viruses. But modern laptops have built-in protections for that. (Turn to "Save on Software" on page 20 for more on that.) First, let's get started with a few basic decisions you'll need to make.

1 Mac or PC?

We're more than a decade removed from the old "Mac vs. PC" ads starring John Hodgman and Justin Long, and while there are still some differences between the two kinds of laptop, our advice here is pretty straightforward: Choose what you're most comfortable with from previous experience.

Most laptops use the Windows operating system, while MacBooks use Apple's macOS. Both are perfectly fine, so if you're used to Windows, you might as well stick with a Windows machine. And if you're familiar with macOS, you can feel confident buying a MacBook. Almost any software you can think of works with either kind of computer.

But if you're toying with the idea of making a change, each platform has its advantages. If you want to spend just a few hundred dollars on a laptop, you should be looking at Windows machines because the least expensive MacBook costs about $1,000 new. (But you can save by purchasing a refurbished MacBook from the Apple website. It will cost less and perform well. Several CR staffers bought their own MacBooks that way.)

If you use an iPhone, there's some benefit to buying a MacBook. It will allow you to easily answer iMessages and conduct FaceTime calls on your Apple laptop. When someone texts you using iMessage, both your laptop and phone will ding, and you can answer from either device.

Similarly, Windows computers can sync with Android phones by using an app like Microsoft's Phone Link.

Do these factors mean that iPhone users should always own MacBooks or that Android users need Windows machines? Not at all: Your phone is just one factor to consider. The bottom line is that you can't go wrong by choosing one type of laptop over the other.

2 The Right Screen Size

Most of the laptops people buy these days are between 10 and 17 inches, measured diagonally across the screen like a TV. As we've already mentioned, choosing a size depends a lot on how much you plan to travel with your new computer.

If you want a truly tiny laptop, consider a 10-inch model like the Microsoft Surface Go 3. Just slightly larger—and more practical for many of us—are 12- and 13-inch models like the Apple MacBook Air. (Both are shown on the facing page.) Laptops in this size range often have a generous battery life and don't weigh much. They can fit into a small knapsack—and even on those tiny airline trays. But the screen and keyboard can feel a bit cramped.

On the other end of the size spectrum you'll find 17- and even 18-inch laptops. These computers (see our ratings starting on page 22) are so large that you may want to place one semipermanently on a desk in a home office or other dedicated space. (They're sometimes called desktop replacements.) Bigger laptops tend to be heavy; the 17-inch Dell Inspiron in the ratings chart weighs 5 pounds, and that's lighter than many laptops of this size. They're relatively expensive, too. What you get in exchange is an expansive display that's great for watching movies or having multiple windows open at the same time.

The sweet spot for many people is a laptop with a screen of about 15 inches. That will let you comfortably binge "Succession" or "Better Call Saul" while sitting in bed, and you'll also have a decent travel companion. There are dozens of CR Recommended laptops in this size range at a wide variety of prices.

PHOTO: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS

Generally speaking, you'll pay more for a higher-quality display in a lighter package with greater performance.

Now once you have an idea about the size of your next laptop, you should start thinking about what's inside the machine, starting with the processor. That can sound complicated, but it's really not.

3 Chip Choices

A quick reminder: The processor (often referred to as the CPU) is more or less the brain of a computer. Today's processors are faster and more capable than ever before, enabling even moderately priced laptops to handle simple photo and video editing tasks. And that means few people need a really top-tier processor in their laptop.

Let's set aside MacBooks for a minute. A large majority of Windows computers in our ratings use either AMD Ryzen or Intel Core processors, and either choice is perfectly fine. You should simply focus on the first number you see at the end of the processor name. Higher numbers mean higher performance–and, typically, higher prices, too.

To start, a laptop whose processor number starts with a 7 or a 9 is overkill for writing email, shopping on Amazon, or doing other typical tasks.

A laptop with a Core i3 or Ryzen 3 chip will work perfectly well for browsing the web, writing email, and so on. But it might feel sluggish if you're editing photos or even watching high-resolution (4K) video.

Spend a bit more and you can get a laptop with a Core i5 or Ryzen 5 chip, an ideal choice for many people. (The ratings chart includes many of these.) Even if the bulk of your time is spent merely browsing social media or streaming YouTube, one of these chips will ensure you can do so smoothly.

Okay, so let's return to the world of MacBooks. These laptops use Apple's own M1 or M2 chips. The M1 chips have been around for a couple of years, while the M2 chips were introduced this year. But MacBooks with the M1 are more than fine: They score very high in CR's ratings and have devoted fans. And choosing a laptop with an M1 can save you some money.

4 Storage and Memory

Depending on how long it's been since you last shopped for a laptop, you might not know that the traditional hard disk drive, the part of the device where all of your data is stored, is on the way out. Now you'll find solid-state storage devices, also known as SSDs, in many laptops. These are faster and thinner than traditional hard drives, and they have helped enable the development of super-thin laptops.

How much storage should you be looking for? Many of the laptops in our ratings have between 256GB and 512GB of solid-state storage, which is a good amount. Some laptops do offer a bit more (say, 1 terabyte), but unless you regularly have a bunch of very large files floating around your computer, that's probably more than you need. On the other hand, try not to go lower than 256GB, our experts advise, or you may run out of space too quickly.

As for memory, laptops tend to come with 8GB or 16GB, and we recommend 16GB if at all possible. That's because memory is where any apps you have open, such as web browsers or productivity suites, are stored while you're using them. If you don't have enough memory, your laptop might feel sluggish when you have a slew of tabs open in your browser. The more memory, the merrier.

Higher-end laptops offer as much as 32GB of memory, but that's more than the average person needs. Feel free to pocket the savings.

Save on Software

Remember the days when Microsoft ruled the world? You couldn't buy a new laptop without springing for Microsoft Office software, too. Otherwise, you had no way to create text documents, spreadsheets, or presentations.

These days you can replace all of that software with Google Docs, Google Sheets, and Google Slides. They're cloud-based applications that work on any kind of computer. You get 15GB of online storage free and 100GB for just $2 per month.

Microsoft offers pared-down versions of Word, Excel, and PowerPoint free, too. You download them from the web rather than bringing them home from a store. These applications can be helpful if you have older Word files you need to access.

But the free Microsoft software is limited. You can't track and review changes in the same way, for example, or customize page layouts as much as you may be used to. If you want the fully featured software suite, it's available for an annual subscription fee of $70 or a one-time purchase price of $150.

What about antivirus software? According to CR's digital security experts, you can rely on Windows Defender, which comes loaded on Windows-based laptops, and Apple's XProtect, which comes installed on MacBooks. Just note that no AV software can keep you safe from all online scams.

Best Laptop Accessories

These add-ons can make your laptop easier and more enjoyable to use when you're at your desk. Then simply leave them behind when it's time to hit the road—or you want to move to the kitchen table.

EXTERNAL MONITOR

ASUS PROART PA248QV $240

77 OVERALL SCORE

An external monitor lets you fit more content on the screen and make what you're viewing bigger. You won't have to scroll through web pages and long documents as often, it will be easier to move between windows, and movies will look more immersive. You can find monitors for well under $200, but we like this slightly more expensive Asus ProArt. It has a 24.5-inch screen with very good picture quality and a handful of USB ports for plugging in other devices.

ERGONOMIC KEYBOARD

KINESIS FREESTYLE 2 $99

4/5

ERGONOMICS

An external keyboard can provide a roomier, more comfortable typing experience than a laptop's built-in keyboard. And if you choose an ergonomic model, it may reduce musculoskeletal stress, too. One of the best ergonomic keyboards we've tested is the Kinesis Freestyle2, which uses a "split" design to help place your shoulders and wrists in an ideal typing position. (There are Mac- and Windows-specific versions of this keyboard.)

ERGONOMIC MOUSE

ADESSO IMOUSE E1 $40

4/5

ERGONOMICS

It's a good idea to pair your external keyboard with an external mouse. It can be much more comfortable to use than a laptop's built-in trackpad. And if you pick an ergonomic mouse, you might also reduce the risk of discomfort or developing more serious musculoskeletal disorders. The Adesso iMouse E1 places your wrist in a kind of "handshake" position to help reduce stress in your forearm and wrist. (One left-handed option is the Adesso iMouse E9.)

WEBCAM

LOGITECH BRIO $200

4/5

PICTURE QUALITY

Your laptop has a built-in webcam for videoconferencing via Zoom and similar services, but it might produce a grainy image. You can fix that with a separate webcam that attaches to the top of your laptop or external monitor. As a bonus, you can position it to capture your image from the best angle. There are many, many webcams to choose from. One great choice is the Logitech Brio, which can produce a 4K (hi-res) picture.

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS; KINESIS; ADESSO; LOGITECH

Ratings › **The Laptop Sweet Spot** You don't need to be a big spender to get a great machine. Here are the top models we've tested for $1,200 and (significantly) less. And at this time of year, you'll find sales, too.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results				Features					
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Portability	Performance	Display	Ergonomics	Battery life, web (hr.)	Battery life, video (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Processor brand	Processor model name	Memory (GB)
17- TO 18-INCH LAPTOPS														
MSI Crosshair 17 A11UDK-643	75	$1,200	▲	▲	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	2.75	3.75	5.9	Intel	Core i7	16
Dell Inspiron i7706-7821SLV	71	$1,080	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	13.25	8.75	5.0	Intel	Core i7	8
15- TO 16-INCH LAPTOPS														
LG Gram 16 (2021)	82	$1,000	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	19.75	10.75	2.6	Intel	Core i5	8
Samsung Galaxy Book Pro (15-inch, i5)	78	$950	▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	15.75	11.75	2.3	Intel	Core i5	8
Lenovo Yoga 7i 16	78	$1,200	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	16.75	13.00	4.4	Intel	Core i7	16
HP Omen 15-EN0013DX	75	$1,180	●	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	9.75	5.25	4.7	AMD	Ryzen 7	8
Lenovo IdeaPad Flex5	74	$1,160	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	12.75	10.00	4.5	Intel	Core i7	16
Acer Aspire Vero AV15-51-7617	73	$750	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	10.25	8.50	3.9	Intel	Core i7	16
Lenovo IdeaPad 5 15IAL7	73	$800	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	14.25	11.00	3.7	Intel	Core i7	12
MSI Pulse GL66	73	$950	▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	7.25	4.00	4.9	Intel	Core i5	8
Dell G15 (AMD)	73	$1,100	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	12.00	9.75	5.6	AMD	Ryzen 7	16
Lenovo IdeaPad Gaming 3 15ACH6	73	$770	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	8.75	7.00	4.5	AMD	Ryzen 5	8
HP Envy 15-EU1073CL x360	73	$950	●	●	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	11.00	6.75	4.0	AMD	Ryzen 7	16
Lenovo Legion 5 15IMH05H	72	$1,100	●	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	9.00	6.25	5.2	Intel	Core i7	8
Samsung Galaxy Book 15	72	$1,000	▲	●	▲▲	▲	●	▲	12.75	7.50	3.5	Intel	Core i7	16
Lenovo IdeaPad 5 15ITL05	72	$550	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	14.5	8.75	3.6	Intel	Core i5	8
Lenovo IdeaPad Gaming 3 15	72	$990	●	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	7.50	4.75	4.5	AMD	Ryzen 7	16
HP Pavilion Gaming 16-A0032DX	71	$980	●	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	7.25	4.50	4.9	Intel	Core i5	8
Microsoft Surface Laptop 4	71	$1,100	●	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	12.25	6.50	3.5	AMD	Ryzen 7	8
Lenovo IdeaPad 3 15ITL6 (2022)	70	$700	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	9.75	6.75	3.7	Intel	Core i5	20
Lenovo IdeaPad 3 15ALC6	70	$610	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	12.00	7.25	3.7	AMD	Ryzen 5	12
Lenovo IdeaPad 1 15	70	$600	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	11.50	6.00	3.6	AMD	Ryzen 7	12
Lenovo IdeaPad Gaming 3 15 (Ryzen 5)	70	$780	●	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	8.50	4.00	4.5	AMD	Ryzen 5	8
Lenovo IdeaPad 3	70	$700	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	13.50	6.75	3.7	AMD	Ryzen 5	8
Lenovo IdeaPad 3 15ITL6	70	$670	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	11.25	7.00	3.7	Intel	Core i5	8
14-INCH LAPTOPS														
LG Gram 14 (2021)	81	$1,050	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	26.75	10.75	2.2	Intel	Core i5	8
MSI Prestige 14 Evo A12M-013	80	$1,100	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	14.00	8.00	2.7	Intel	Core i5	16
Asus ZenBook UM3402YA-IS76T	76	$1,200	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	12.00	9.75	3.1	AMD	Ryzen 7	16

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results				Features					
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Portability	Performance	Display	Ergonomics	Battery life, web (hr.)	Battery life, video (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Processor brand	Processor model name	Memory (GB)
14-INCH LAPTOPS *Continued*														
Acer Swift 3 SF314-512-52MZ	76	$850							23.25	13.25	2.8	Intel	Core i5	16
Acer Swift 3 SF314-511-75UX	73	$900							27.25	11.25	2.7	Intel	Core i7	16
Acer Swift 3 SF314-511-593F	72	$750							25.50	9.75	2.7	Intel	Core i5	8
Lenovo IdeaPad 5 Pro 14ACN6	71	$900							13.75	7.25	3.3	AMD	Ryzen 5	16
MSI Modern 14 B10RASW-078	70	$890							7.75	6.50	2.8	Intel	Core i7	8
12- TO 13-INCH LAPTOPS														
Apple MacBook Air 13-inch (2022, M2, 8 Core)	81	$1,200							12.75	11.75	2.7	Apple	M2 (8 core)	8
Samsung Galaxy Book2 360	80	$1,150							17.25	7.75	2.5	Intel	Core i7	16
Samsung Galaxy Book2 Pro (Core i5)	80	$1,100							20.00	8.25	2.0	Intel	Core i5	8
Apple MacBook Air 13-Inch (2020, M1)	79	$1,000							12.50	10.75	2.8	Apple	M1 (8 core)	8
Samsung Galaxy Book Flex2 Alpha	78	$900							14.00	8.75	2.5	Intel	Core i7	16
Lenovo Yoga 6 13	73	$990							17.50	11.50	2.9	AMD	Ryzen 7	16
Apple MacBook Air 13-inch (2020)	72	$950							12.75	7.00	2.8	Intel	Core i3	8
Asus ZenBook Flip UX363EA-IH74T	72	$1,150							15.50	11.00	2.7	Intel	Core i7	16
Microsoft Surface Laptop 3 (13-inch)	71	$920							13.50	7.00	2.8	Intel	Core i5	8
HP Pavilion Aero 13Z-BE000	70	$750							14.25	6.75	2.1	AMD	Ryzen 5	8
HP Envy 13-BA1095CL	70	$800							18.75	7.50	2.8	Intel	Core i7	16
Samsung Galaxy Book S	70	$950							14.75	8.75	2.1	Intel	Core i5	8
Dell Inspiron i5310-7916SLV	70	$970							15.50	7.75	2.7	Intel	Core i7	16
10- TO 11-INCH LAPTOPS														
Microsoft Surface Go 3 (Pentium)	56	$500							13.75	6.75	1.7	Intel	Pentium Gold	4
Microsoft Surface Go 3 (Core i3)	56	$730							14.00	6.25	1.7	Intel	Core i3	8

Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/laptops.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the performance of the product in all tests combined with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. Scores between size categories aren't comparable.

Predicted reliability estimates the likelihood that a newly purchased model from a brand will develop problems within the first three years of ownership. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members extremely likely to recommend their laptop. **Portability** considers battery life, size, and weight. **Performance** involves productivity and multimedia app use, web browsing, and 3D games. **Display** reflects clarity, color, contrast, brightness, and glare. **Ergonomics** includes keyboard, trackpad, and feature accessibility. **Battery life** is measured while laptop loads a series of web pages over WiFi and again as it loops a 4K video.

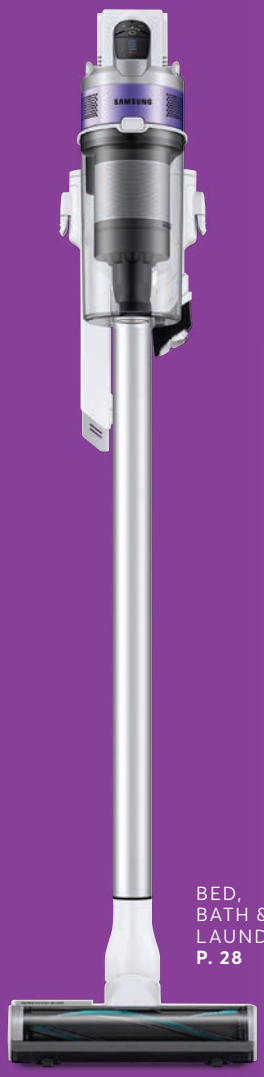
POOR — EXCELLENT | CR RECOMMENDED | CR BEST BUY

OUTDOOR LIVING
P. 34

HEALTH
P. 30

TECH
P. 32

CR's TOP I OF 2022



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PICKS

CONSUMER REPORTS TOP PICKS

Consumer Reports evaluates thousands of products each year—many of them with an impressive mix of performance, reliability, and value. We share those with you in the ratings and reviews we include in every issue. So what makes the selections on the following pages worth a special spotlight? These 86 products—from appliances to outdoor gear to autos—are the very best of the best. They're the models that ace our rigorous tests or offer something extra: The smartest, most sustainable design, for example, or the latest safety features, or an irresistibly low price.

Read on for our experts' Top Picks of 2022—the products they'd personally recommend to you and, in some cases, that they love owning themselves.

OUTDOOR
LIVING
P. 34

COOKING &

WE LOVE ... APPLIANCES WITH SOMETHING EXTRA

Ranges

1 | TOP-RATED ELECTRIC MODEL

GE Profile PSS93YPFS $2,000

88

Stellar all-around performance makes this smoothtop range from GE a winning choice. It's also loaded with features, including convection and an air-fry setting.

TOP-RATED GAS MODEL

LG LSGL6335D $1,980

82

BEST BUDGET GAS PICK

GE JGB660YPFS $1,000

77

Dishwashers

IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE

Bosch 100 Series SHEM3AY55N $650

84

This longtime CR favorite offers fantastic washing performance at a reasonable price—and the brand gets top reliability marks.

2 | GREAT CONVENIENCE FEATURES

Bosch 800 Series SHXM88Z75N $1,500

85

ATTRACTIVE FINISH OPTIONS

Café CDT845P2NS1 $1,260

74

Refrigerators

3 | STANDOUT FRENCH-DOOR

GE GFD28GYNFS $3,400

81

This GE model is easy to use and excels at keeping food at the right temperature. Plus, it has a generous 20 cubic feet of usable storage space inside.

4 | EXTRA-ROOMY SIDE-BY-SIDE

LG LRSDS2706S $2,000

76

NICE PRICE TOP-FREEZER

Frigidaire FFTR1835VW $730

72

PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

THE BETTER DEAL

NONSTICK FRYING PANS

HIGHER PRICE

$100

GreenPan Reserve

88

BETTER PRICE

$50

Anolon Advanced

87

CLEANUP

Joanne Chen
Deputy Editor, Home

I OWN THIS!

DUTCH OVEN

Le Creuset Signature $420

76

I've relied on my Le Creuset since I received it as a wedding gift 14 years ago, whipping up everything from billowy Dutch baby pancakes to perfectly braised chicken. It's easy to keep clean and so solid that the lifetime warranty doesn't feel like a stretch.

THE LOWDOWN

Both of these impressive nonstick frying pan sets are made of hard-anodized aluminum, but the GreenPan has a ceramic coating and can withstand oven temperatures up to 600° F.

WHAT'S NEW & COOL

Kitchen Mama $30

Can Opener

Here's an easy alternative to those hard-to-grip hand-crank openers. With the touch of a button, this battery-operated model opens any can quickly, leaving a smooth, safe edge around the rim.

GE Profile PHP9030DJBB $2,000

95

Induction Cooktop

Want speedy boiling, steady simmering, and energy savings, too? An induction cooktop, like this excellent pick, is a smart upgrade from standard electric smoothtop models.

Coffee Maker

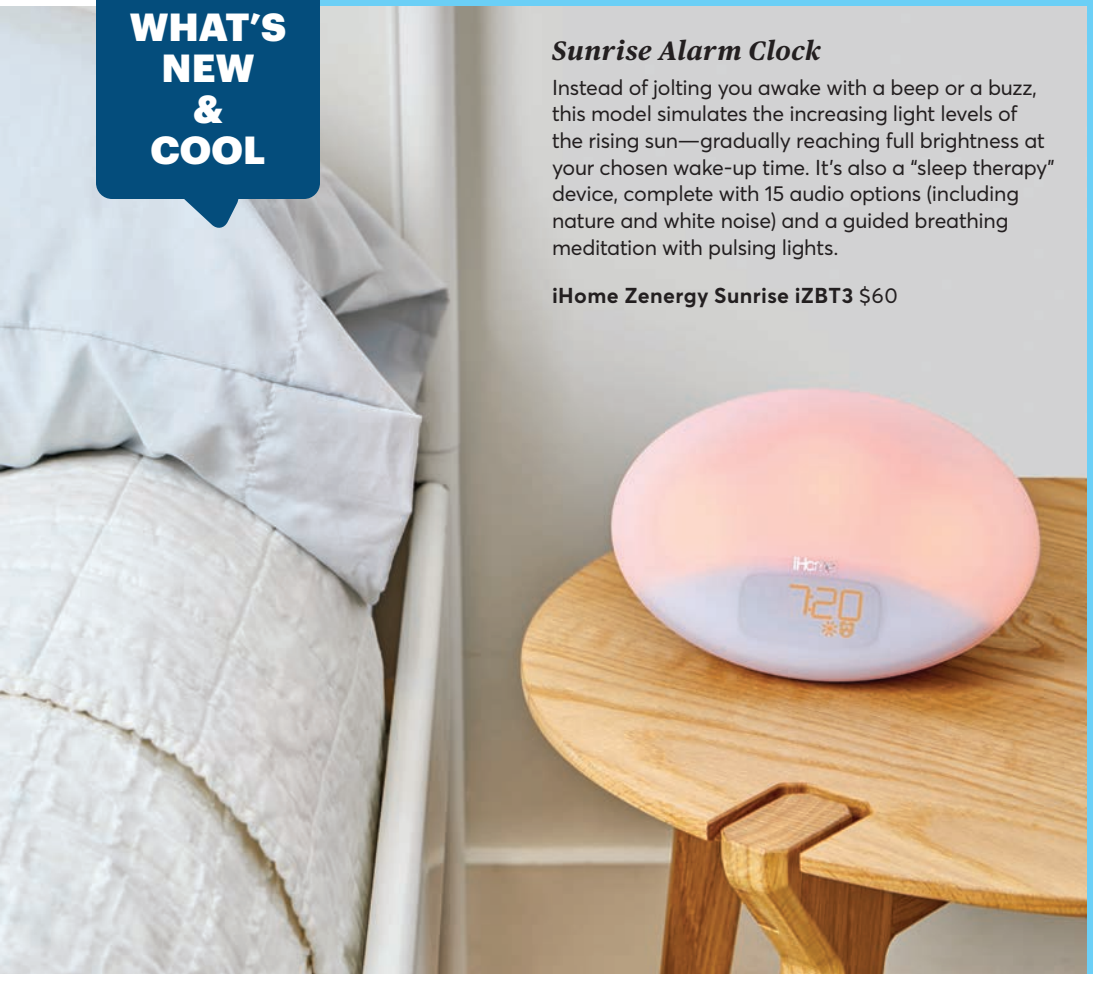
From convenient single servings to hot (or cold) java for a crowd, this model can do it all: It works with K-Cups and ground coffee, has an over-ice brew mode, and even comes with a milk frother.

Ninja DualBrew Pro 12-Cup CFP301 $180

76

BED, BATH &

WHAT'S NEW & COOL



Sunrise Alarm Clock

Instead of jolting you awake with a beep or a buzz, this model simulates the increasing light levels of the rising sun—gradually reaching full brightness at your chosen wake-up time. It's also a "sleep therapy" device, complete with 15 audio options (including nature and white noise) and a guided breathing meditation with pulsing lights.

iHome Zenergy Sunrise iZBT3 $60

Top-Load Washer

This smart washer might actually make laundry less of a chore, playing music, forecasting weather, and accepting Alexa voice commands to adjust washer settings for specific load types.

GE Profile PTW900BPTRS
$1,150
68

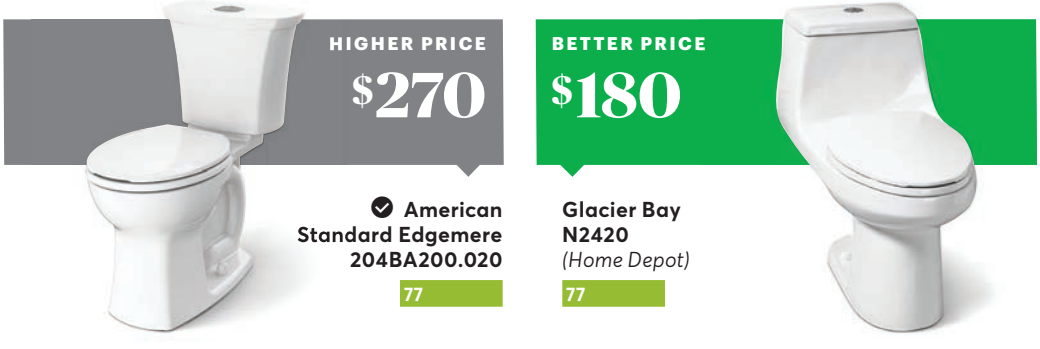
Air Purifier

Excellent scores for dust, pollen, and smoke removal at high speed and an energy-saving sleep mode make this air purifier an attractive choice. And it's less than half the price of many of our other recommended models.

✔ **Winix 9800** $330
77

THE BETTER DEAL

DUAL-FLUSH TOILETS



HIGHER PRICE
$270

✔ **American Standard Edgemere 204BA200.020**
77

BETTER PRICE
$180

Glacier Bay N2420
(Home Depot)
77

THE LOWDOWN

The American Standard Edgemere is our top-rated dual-flush toilet (you can choose the level of flush required, a water-saving feature), as well as one of the quietest in our tests. The lower-priced Glacier Bay is a bit noisier, but it does better on our waste-removal test—and, unlike the Edgemere, it comes with a seat.

& LAUNDRY

Tanya Christian
Multimedia Content Creator, Home

I OWN THIS!

PAINT

Behr Marquee $53

95

I'm for anything that helps me get a paint job done faster and stretches out the time between touch-ups. This interior paint tops our ratings with a stain-resistant, one-coat finish—no primer required. It helped speed up my own home-improvement projects and still looks great. The low volatile-organic-compound formula makes it a good pick for a bedroom, too.

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

WE LOVE ... A CLEAN AND COMFY HOME

Mattresses

1 | TOP INNERSPRING

Avocado Green $1,999

84

Made with both springs and latex, this mattress-in-a-box has long held a top spot in our ratings. It's a good choice for people who like firm mattresses and provides plenty of support for sleepers of all sizes.

2 | LESS PRICEY INNERSPRING

Denver Mattress Doctor's Choice Plush $750

82

3 | VALUE PICK

Novaform 10" SoFresh Responsive Foam $500

76

Washer & Dryer Pairs

4 | BEST FRONT-LOAD PAIR

LG WM4000HWA + LG DLEX4000W $1,900

88

Our top-rated washer-dryer pair boasts large capacity for both machines, so you can get more laundry done, faster. Convenience features include steam cycles that help remove stains and wrinkles.

BEST HE TOP-LOAD PAIR

LG WT7100CW + LG DLE7100W $1,700

84

5 | BEST TOP-LOAD AGITATOR PAIR

LG WT7305CW + LG DLE7300WE $2,000

81

Stick Vacuums

EXCEPTIONAL CLEANING POWER

Tineco Pure One S11 $350

96

This top-rated cordless vac aces our cleaning tests and boasts a slew of handy extras, including an LED battery-life indicator and a sensor to detect the amount of debris and adjust suction accordingly.

6 | EASY-TO-READ DIGITAL DISPLAY

Samsung Jet Light VS70 VS15T7031R4/AA $280

91

BUDGET BUY

Tineco A10 Dash *(Walmart)* $150

88

POOR — EXCELLENT | CR RECOMMENDED | CR BEST BUY | CR GREEN CHOICE

HEALTH

WE LOVE ... GEAR THAT KEEPS YOU HEALTHIER

Sunscreen

1 | TOP-RATED SPRAY

Trader Joe's Spray SPF 50+ $6

74

This sunscreen provides great protection against rays that cause burning, aging, and skin cancer, at a good price. It's fragrance-free and has a barely there feel—our testers say it leaves just a light film on their skin.

TOP-RATED LOTION

La Roche-Posay Anthelios Melt-In Milk Lotion SPF 60 $37

73

2 | BEST BARGAIN LOTION

Equate *(Walmart)* **Ultra Lotion SPF 50** $5.35

68

Exercise Bikes

3 | BEST OVERALL CHOICE

Peloton $1,450

88

The Peloton is the most adjustable and feature-packed bike in our ratings, offering a variety of exercise programs through its connected service ($39 per month) on the 22-inch touchscreen display.

4 | LESS PRICEY PICK

Sole SB900 $1,000

80

EASY TO USE WITH EXERCISE APPS

Schwinn IC4 $1,000

78

Blood Pressure Monitors

5 | MOST ACCURATE

Omron Platinum BP5450 *(Amazon)* $79

86

In addition to top-notch performance, this monitor offers a wide range of useful features, including an irregular-heartbeat detector and the ability to store readings for more than one user.

6 | MORE PORTABLE

Omron Evolv BP7000 $110

83

BEST DRUGSTORE MODEL

Rite Aid Deluxe Automatic BP3AR1-4DRITE $60

80

THE BETTER DEAL

FITNESS TRACKERS

HIGHER PRICE

$150

Fitbit Charge 5

79

BETTER PRICE

$80

Amazon Halo View

75

POOR — EXCELLENT | CR RECOMMENDED | CR BEST BUY

Trisha Calvo
Deputy Editor,
Health and Food

I OWN THIS!

SUNSCREEN LOTION

La Roche-Posay Anthelios Melt-In Milk Lotion SPF 60 $37

73

This sunscreen has continuously been at the top of CR's ratings for several years, so I know I can trust its protection. But how a sunscreen feels is also important to me, so I'm willing to pay more for one that's lightweight and sinks into my skin without leaving a sticky residue. I've tried a lot of sunscreens, and this has become my go-to for face and body year-round.

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

THE LOWDOWN

In terms of performance, these models are very evenly matched, so it's hard to choose between them. The Charge 5 has a stainless steel case and is a bit easier to use, but the Halo View's lower price might be well worth the trade-off.

WHAT'S NEW & COOL

Electric Bike

E-bikes make riding easier (and arguably more fun). This one is a good all-around bike with a retro look, a comfy saddle, and electric assistance when you want it—like getting up a hill!

Electra Townie Go 7D $1,900

74

Massage Gun

Percussive massagers ("massage guns") can deliver the effects of a deep-tissue massage in your own home. This model is small, lightweight, relatively quiet, and well-priced—a great pick for most users.

Renpho R3 Massage Gun $70

Vegan Ice Cream

When it comes to sweet treats, the "health" factor can be relative, but this one is a slightly better choice than regular dairy ice cream. And it tastes great, with rich dark-chocolate flavor that makes it a worthy occasional indulgence.

Häagen-Dazs Non-Dairy Frozen Dessert Chocolate Salted Fudge Truffle $5.50

49

TECH

WE LOVE ... GREAT GADGETS

Smartphones

1 | SMARTEST PHONE

iPhone 13 $700

80

This phone earns stellar marks for its bright display, impressive 40-hour battery life, and crisp photos and videos. At press time, we were testing the iPhone 14, $800, and expect similar performance.

2 | BEST AT A LOWER PRICE

Samsung Galaxy A53 5G $450

71

3 | TOP ANDROID PICK

Samsung Galaxy S22 5G $800

79

Noise-Canceling Headphones

4 | MOST IMPRESSIVE

Bose Noise Cancelling Headphones 700 $270

88

Great headphones don't have to cost a fortune. This pair has excellent sound quality and sound-blocking ability—for much less than some similar models.

5 | LESS EXPENSIVE OVER-EAR MODEL

Monoprice BT-300ANC $45

74

6 | GOOD WIRELESS OPTION

Sennheiser CX Plus $130

76

TVs

7 | WINNING PICTURE QUALITY

Samsung QN65S95B *(65″)* $2,000

86

The top-rated 65-inch model in our ratings, this Samsung uses new QD-OLED technology, for exceptional overall picture quality and great high dynamic range (HDR) performance—among the best we've seen.

8 | 65-INCH TV BARGAIN

Hisense 65U8H *(65″)* $1,000

68

9 | SMALLER, WITH GREAT HDR

Samsung QN43QN90B *(43″)* $1,000

71

Chris Raymond
Deputy Editor, Tech

I OWN THIS!

WIRELESS ROUTER

TP-Link Deco Whole Home *(3-Pack)* **Wireless Router** $170

72

I bought this mesh router when I started working at home full-time, and it's the best money I've spent in years. The system is inexpensive, is easy to set up (using the TP-Link mobile app), and effectively eliminates the WiFi dead spots in my home. I even get a reliable signal on the backyard patio now.

THE BETTER DEAL

TABLETS

HIGHER PRICE

$600

✔ iPad Air *(2022)*

85

BETTER PRICE

$330

$ iPad

87

THE LOWDOWN

The iPad Air has excellent photo and video quality and more processing power than the basic iPad, so it whips through tasks such as opening apps and downloading files. But the basic iPad is no slouch, either—you probably wouldn't notice any difference in speed. In fact, it scores better overall in our tests.

WHAT'S NEW & COOL

Smartphone

This folding model transforms from a palm-sized square that's easily tucked into a pocket to a full 6.7-inch smartphone. You can customize the front display to show key info, such as the time or weather. (CR will have test results soon.)

✔ **Samsung Galaxy Z Flip4** $1,000

Wireless Speaker

A speaker from Ikea? Yes, but one with innards from Sonos, for sound far better than you might expect for the price. Stand it on a shelf or mount it on the wall horizontally (so it becomes a handy shelf itself).

$ **Ikea Symfonisk Bookshelf** *(Gen. 2)* $120

61

Home Security Camera

In addition to its solid scores in our tests, this wireless camera offers energy-saving convenience: It's one of the first with a built-in solar panel, so it can stay charged with just 2 hours of direct sunlight per day.

✔ **Eufy Solo Cam S40** $200

73

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

POOR — EXCELLENT | ✔ CR RECOMMENDED | $ CR BEST BUY

OUTDOOR L

WHAT'S NEW & COOL

Outdoor Pizza Oven

The beauty of this oven goes beyond its sleek styling: You can heat it with wood for classic smoky flavor or swap in the included gas burner for better temperature control. The round shape makes it easy to see and rotate pies as they cook.

Solo Stove Pi $440

Wireless Bluetooth Speaker

This rechargeable speaker lets you take your favorite tunes outside. It's not our top-rated model, but it delivers satisfying sound, can handle a splash or even a dunk in the pool, and comes in a range of fun colors.

Sony SRS-XB23 $110

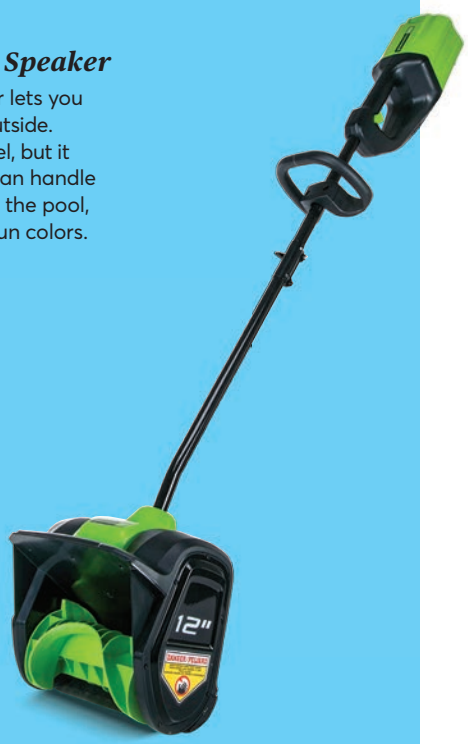
56

Power Snow Shovel

Faster than a manual shovel and (much) smaller than a snow blower, a power snow shovel clears several inches per pass, making it perfect for tending decks, walkways, and patios.

Greenworks 2600602 Power Snow Shovel $350

89



WE LOVE ... HARD-WORKI

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

THE BETTER DEAL

HEAVY-DUTY CORDLESS DRILLS

IVING

NG TOOLS

Battery-Powered String Trimmers

TOPS FOR SERIOUS TRIMMING

✔ **Makita XRU15PT** $340

92

With the power you need to plow through even tall grass and weeds, this top-of-the-line model also excels at precise trimming and edging. Use the interchangeable battery to run other tools from Makita.

1 | NICE PRICE

$ **Ego ST1502SA** $200

91

QUIETER AND EASY TO HANDLE

✔ **Kobalt** *(Lowe's)* **KST 2580-06** $250

90

Lawn Mowers

2 | LONG-RUNNING BATTERY SELF-PROPELLED

✔ **Ryobi RY401210US** $900

84

Have a lot of lawn to mow? This impressive and reliable workhorse has up to a 75-minute run time (when you use the supplied extra battery). Charge time is a speedy 1 hour.

3 | EASY-TO-HANDLE BATTERY SELF-PROPELLED

✔ **Ego LM2156SP-2** $1,000

83

4 | BEST GAS PUSH MOWER

✔ **Honda HRN216PKA** $530

78

Grills

5 | TOP LARGE GAS GRILL

✔ **Monument Grills 77352** $750

84

Our top-rated large gas grill is also one of the lower-priced models in our tests. With six burners and over 500 square inches of cooking surface, it heats up quickly and evenly.

BEST KAMADO

✔ **Kamado Joe Classic II 18" KJ23RHC** $1,100

79

6 | GREAT SMALL GAS GRILL

✔ **Weber Spirit E-210 46110001** $570

72

Paul Hope
Senior Multimedia Content Creator, Home

I OWN THIS!

LIGHTER-DUTY GAS CHAINSAW

✔ **Echo CS-3510** $280

73

When I needed a chainsaw to clear some fallen limbs after a big storm, I quickly decided on this Echo model that stood out in our tests. While the rest of my neighborhood waited for tree services to return their calls, I cleaned up the mess in a single afternoon as the saw powered its way through heavy branches in no time.

HIGHER PRICE
$340

✔ **Milwaukee 18-Volt 2805-22**

86

BETTER PRICE
$190

Flex 24-Volt FX1171T-2B

87

THE LOWDOWN

Milwaukee is known for making contractor-grade tools, and this drill is no exception. Near the top of our ratings, it's fast-charging and powerful enough for the toughest tasks. Flex, a relative newcomer to the market, may lack Milwaukee's name recognition, but this model makes up for that with slightly superior performance, easily drilling and driving for a much lower price.

POOR — EXCELLENT | ✔ CR RECOMMENDED | $ CR BEST BUY

AUTOS

WE LOVE ... SMART BUYS

Under $35,000

1 | SMALL SUV

Hyundai Tucson Hybrid
$29,750-$43,200
93

The Tucson shines, with the hybrid powertrain providing quicker and quieter acceleration than the base engine, plus 35 mpg overall. Ride, handling, and cabin are all impressive.

2 | SUBCOMPACT SUV

Subaru Crosstrek $23,645-$36,845
86

3 | SMALL SEDAN

Nissan Sentra $19,950-$22,700
77

Over $35,000

4 | MIDSIZED SUV

Toyota Highlander Hybrid
$39,555-$51,460
87

The midsized, three-row Highlander is a sensible all-around, family-friendly SUV. The hybrid delivers stellar fuel economy, at 35 mpg overall—more than most small SUVs.

5 | LUXURY COMPACT SEDAN

Audi A4 $39,900-$50,900
85

6 | LUXURY COMPACT SUV

BMW X3 $45,400-$72,900
81

Jeff S. Bartlett
Managing Editor, Cars

I OWN THIS!

EV CHARGER

JuiceBox 40
$624

Based on CR's evaluation, I chose a 40-amp, WiFi-enabled JuiceBox–an easy-to-use smart charger with an app for monitoring and scheduling, and a 25-foot cable. It did require a professional electrician to install a 240-volt line to my garage, but it's super-convenient and all but eliminates any concerns about vehicle range.

THE BETTER DEAL

SMALL SUVs

HIGHER PRICE

$47,590*

*Price as tested.

Lexus NX350h
(38 mpg)

83

BETTER PRICE

$40,160*

Toyota Venza
(37 mpg)

83

THE LOWDOWN

The Lexus NX350h is a feature-rich small SUV that delivers great fuel economy. But its finicky controls, compromised visibility, and heady price limit its appeal. The Toyota Venza hybrid has similar interior room, performance, and fuel economy—and it feels more upscale than the brand and price suggest.

WHAT'S NEW & COOL

Electric SUV

The Mach-E takes design inspiration from the Mustang muscle car and wraps it around an electric crossover, typically with 270 miles of range. Plus, it offers BlueCruise active driving assistance with hands-free driving on certain North American highways.

Ford Mustang Mach-E
$43,895-$61,995

82

Sports Car

The GR86 is an entry-level sports car crafted for drivers who prize razor-sharp handling and track-ready performance. This stylish coupe is highly entertaining and a great value.

Toyota GR86
$27,900-$32,000

77

Compact SUV

The Sportage shines in hybrid form, with smooth power and a thrifty 36 mpg overall. An available panoramic display blends two screens under a curved 25-inch piece of glass, making the cabin look upscale and futuristic.

Kia Sportage Hybrid
$27,290-$42,990

75

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

Stay Warm & Save Big on Heat This Winter

BE COMFORTABLE ALL SEASON WITHOUT BLOWING YOUR BUDGET.

by Janet Siroto

DOORS

Got a gap between the bottom of your door and the threshold? A door sweep ($5 to $32) helps keep heat in and cold air out.

WINDOWS

"Low-e" storm windows may cut up to $600 from the average home energy bill of $2,000 a year.

ATTICS

Sealing air leaks and adding needed insulation, especially in areas like drafty attics, could save you more than $200 a year.

Winter has its charms—

hot cocoa and that first snow, to name two—but it can be harsh. And while much of the news about climate change focuses on the warming of our planet, it can also trigger extreme winter weather. Hence, we're seeing more news about "Snowmageddon" and "bombogenesis" conditions in some parts of the country.

"Climate change is wreaking havoc with weather, including long cold snaps that really stress our grid and make it hard to afford heating," says Rebecca Foster, CEO of VEIC, a nonprofit that administers energy-efficiency programs across North America.

What about those costs? Federal officials predicted some consumers would spend 30 percent more, on average, on heating in 2021-2022 than the year before, but it's not clear yet how that has netted out. Looking ahead, "the situation in Ukraine has triggered an energy shortage in Europe, so America's fuel supply is in greater demand," says Christine Ciavardini of MD Energy Advisors, which offers businesses and other organizations advice on energy choices. "I wouldn't be surprised if we saw prices go 10 percent higher than last year."

Still, there's a lot you can do to stay snug throughout winter—affordably. And safely, because it's key to use products like backup generators and space heaters properly. Here are the latest ways to make your home warm and cozy, from sealing up leaks to upgrading your heating system.

8 Essential Steps for Your Home

FOR THE TYPICAL American household, utility bills are about $2,000 a year, according to the most recent Department of Energy figures.* Heating an average home accounts for about $900 of that. So you want to keep the warm air you pay for inside instead of flying out through drafty windows, wonky doors that don't fit their frames, and under-insulated attics and basements. Weatherizing your home is job No. 1 and may whittle down heating and cooling costs by 20 percent annually (or about $220), the DOE says. Keeping your heat and hot water systems running smoothly and taking advantage of available rebates and tax credits may save you even more.

Schedule a checkup.

Professional servicing of your heating system (typically $150 to $500 for an entire HVAC system) will include everything from replacing dirty filters to checking for safety issues like potential carbon monoxide leaks. A heating system that's running efficiently may save you money. For instance, the DOE says a well-maintained heat pump can use up to 25 percent less fuel than a neglected one. (Read more on this on page 42.) "Ideally, have this done in what's known as the swing season, before the real cold kicks in," says Larry Zarker, CEO of the Building Performance Institute Inc., a nonprofit credentialing and standard-setting organization for the industry. Also check air filters from time to time for dust and dirt, and change them if they're dirty.

Decide whether to have an energy audit.

Think you'd benefit from details on your home's energy performance? A trained energy assessor can evaluate it for issues like insufficient insulation or a heating system that might warrant replacement–and help develop a plan to improve efficiency and lower your energy bills. This can cost $210 to $670 but may uncover ways to lower your monthly energy bills by up to 30 percent, according to the DOE.

The Home Performance with Energy Star program, a collaboration between the DOE and the Environmental Protection Agency, matches consumers in 20 states with reputable home performance contractors for assessments.

PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: TIM BIEBER/GETTY IMAGES. PHOTO, LEFT: MARTIN MORRELL/OTTO

*The $2,000 amount is based on the Department of Energy's most recent estimate on what typical U.S. families spend annually on home energy bills. But energy use and savings will depend on such factors as local climate and the type of heating and cooling system used.

$600 How much a professional energy audit may help reduce your annual energy spending by identifying leaks and inefficient heating and cooling appliances and systems in your home.

(Go to energystar.gov/hpwes and click on Find Local Help.) Other options include the Home Energy Score program (homeenergyscore.gov; click on Homeowner Resources); an auditor registered with the Residential Energy Services Network (hersindex.com/find-a-hers-rater); or a local certified inspector from the Building Performance Institute (bpihomeowner.org), which sets standards for energy audits and certifies analysts. Utilities may offer free audits, but they're not always thorough, Zarker says.

Sleuth out leaky doors, windows, and more.

To play air leak detective, hold a lit stick of incense in front of windows and doors while inside. Horizontal smoke indicates less-than-airtight closures. Or dampen the back of your hand and run it around door frames to feel for cool outside air that's making its way in. You can also use a handheld thermal leak detector (about $26). These same techniques will reveal air leaks near sinks and toilets, electrical outlets, attic hatches, and ceiling fixtures. "Can lights in your ceiling can funnel heated air right out of your home," Zarker says.

Window Wisdom

Windows that fit imperfectly can allow cold air in during the winter. If caulking and similar fixes (see page 42) aren't enough to stop air leaks, consider low-emissivity (low-e) storm windows, which are coated to help keep the warmth inside in colder regions and the heat outside in warmer climates. (Bright sun pouring through glass panes in the summer can make your home a lot hotter.) Adding these products, available at home centers for $100 to $300 each, to inefficient older windows can help save up to $600 on an average annual energy bill of $2,000. And you can easily put them in yourself. Still not enough? Consider window replacement. Costs vary widely, depending on such factors as size and style. If you're a CR member, you can refer to our replacement window ratings to help you choose. The nonprofit National Fenestration Rating Council (nfrc.org) also rates and labels the energy efficiency of windows, doors, and skylights.

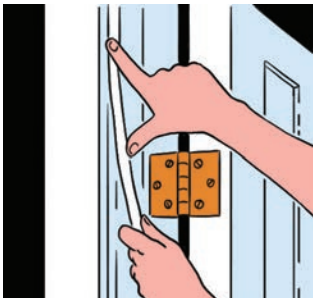
CR'S TOP-RATED VINYL WINDOWS

New windows can make your home quieter and less drafty, and may be easier to clean than older models.

- **Simonton Reflections 5500** $350 — 73
- **Jeld-Wen V-2500 Series** $295 — 69

INSULATE YOUR HOT-WATER SYSTEM. Slipping foam "sleeves" (about $11 each) around water pipes in or near exterior walls **may save up to $80 per year** and reduce the risk of pipes freezing if temps dip below zero. Wrap a heat jacket (about $30 to $45) around your hot-water heater (if your utility company allows it) and it won't have to work as hard.

$2,000 How much installing an electric heat pump may net you in tax credits under a new federal law. If you put in a solar energy system, you can receive a 30 percent tax credit on eligible expenses.



Seal those leaks the right way.

Now that you've identified leaky spots, seal them up. Start by adding inexpensive weather stripping or caulking to doors and window frames that need it. (Weather stripping is best for components that move, like operable windows, and caulking for those that don't move, like windows that don't open.) Also consider applying temporary clear plastic window film to the inside of windows and patio doors. Come spring, it will be easy to remove. (Find kits with enough film and tape to apply to five windows for $30 or so at home centers and Amazon.)

For cold air that creeps in at the bottom of doors, you can purchase a draft stopper "snake," cover the area with a rolled-up towel, or install a screw-on, stick-on, or slip-on door sweep. They're available at home centers and hardware stores for about $5 to $32 each. To keep chilly air from blowing through outlets and switch plates on exterior-touching walls, put foam gaskets behind them. They're less than $6 for a six-pack.

You'll have to replace all of these products from time to time. "Weather sealing around doors does wear," says Ciavardini of MD Energy Advisors. "Spending $10 at Home Depot to replace it can be impactful."

Address attic issues.

The top level of your house can be a notorious source of heat loss because in winter, warm air rises in what's called the stack effect. So making sure that warm air from living areas doesn't leak into the attic is quite important. In addition to checking for window drafts and other air leaks, it's smart to assess attic insulation, which is "akin to a sweater for your house,"

says Lauren Urbanek, senior energy policy advocate at the nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council. What you may add in warmth and save in dollars by ensuring your attic is well insulated varies from place to place and house to house. But it can be significant.

For a quick evaluation, take a look at your attic. If the insulation looks uneven (perhaps it's heaped up in the middle of the floor but thin along the eaves) or it's below or just at the level of the floor joists, you probably need to add more of it, according to the Energy Star program. It's often best to hire a trained insulation contractor for this, because attics and insulation materials can make for challenging work, Zarker says. (Find leads at

What's a Heat Pump, Anyway?

There's been a lot of buzz lately about the environment-friendly and potentially money-saving properties of heat pumps, electricity-powered products that can serve as furnaces in the winter and air conditioning systems in the summer. In the winter, a heat pump absorbs ambient heat from the outdoors and transfers it to your home. (There's some warmth in the air even on chilly days.) In the summer, it can shift indoor heat outside. In a June 2022 CR nationally representative survey of 2,103 adults in the U.S., 75 percent of those who had a heat pump said they'd make the same choice again.

While it used to be thought that heat pumps were only for moderate climates, that's not necessarily the case for newer models. "The latest generation of heat pumps are super-efficient and work well even in cold climates," and that means less variable energy bills, says Rebecca Foster, CEO of VEIC, which administers energy efficiency programs.

One study suggests that heat pumps may reduce annual heating bills by almost $1,000 compared with traditional oil-driven systems, but there's no definitive data. And the average purchase and installation runs $5,798, with some well into the five figures. This is a good moment to consider one, though, due to numerous rebates and tax credits. (See more on savings on the facing page.)

MOST RELIABLE HEAT PUMP BRANDS*

American Standard 5/5

Trane 5/5

Bryant 4/5

Carrier 4/5

Lennox 4/5

*Results are based on Consumer Reports' 2019 and 2021 surveys of 13,458 members who purchased a heat pump between 2005 and 2021.

PHOTO, LEFT: TRANE

the Insulation Contractors Association of America, at insulate.org.) How much insulation is optimal depends on what you already have, the local climate (check your area at energy.gov/energysaver/insulation), and the kind of insulating product you choose.

Batten down your basement.

"Along with attics, basements and crawl spaces are responsible for the most energy loss in a home," Zarker says. Warmth escaping through uninsulated basement walls and windows can account for up to one-third of the heat loss in the average home, according to the Building Science Corporation, a consulting firm for the DOE.

Insulating and sealing basement air leaks is often best left to a certified professional with expertise in basement work because of potential combustion, moisture, and air-quality issues. Find certified pros at locate.bpi.org.

Seek out savings, rebates, and tax breaks.

Energy prices may be up, but an increasing number of strategies can help you cover those costs. There's also funding available

Winter Storm Prep Made Easy

- Have at least three days' worth of nonperishable food (including pet food) that requires little or no cooking, water, or refrigeration. Stock a gallon of water a day for each person and pet.
- Have ice melt, snow shovels, and a fueled-up snow blower at hand, not across your yard.
- Insulate exposed water pipes in your garage, attic, and crawl space so they'll be less likely to freeze and burst if you lose heat. (Wrap them in newspaper in a pinch.) If the power goes off in a very cold spell, flip the main water shutoff valve and leave all taps slightly open.
- Place flashlights and fresh batteries for each family member in an easily accessible spot.
- Charge electronics to capacity when storm warnings are issued. Consider buying a portable charger or power bank (about $20 to $40).
- If you'll be using a wood or gas fireplace or wood stove, have a working smoke detector and battery-operated carbon monoxide detector near the area to be heated. Test them monthly.
- If you'll be using a portable backup generator, have fuel and an operating carbon monoxide detector. Place the generator outdoors at least 20 feet from doors, windows, and vents—and where it will stay dry. Never use it inside, even in an open-door garage. That can drive dangerous exhaust into your house.

TOP-RATED PORTABLE GENERATORS

These devices can keep your electricity on when the power fails.

79

BEST PORTABLE

Champion 201156
$700

75

BEST PORTABLE ABOVE 7,000 WATTS

Generac XT8500EFI
$1,200

84

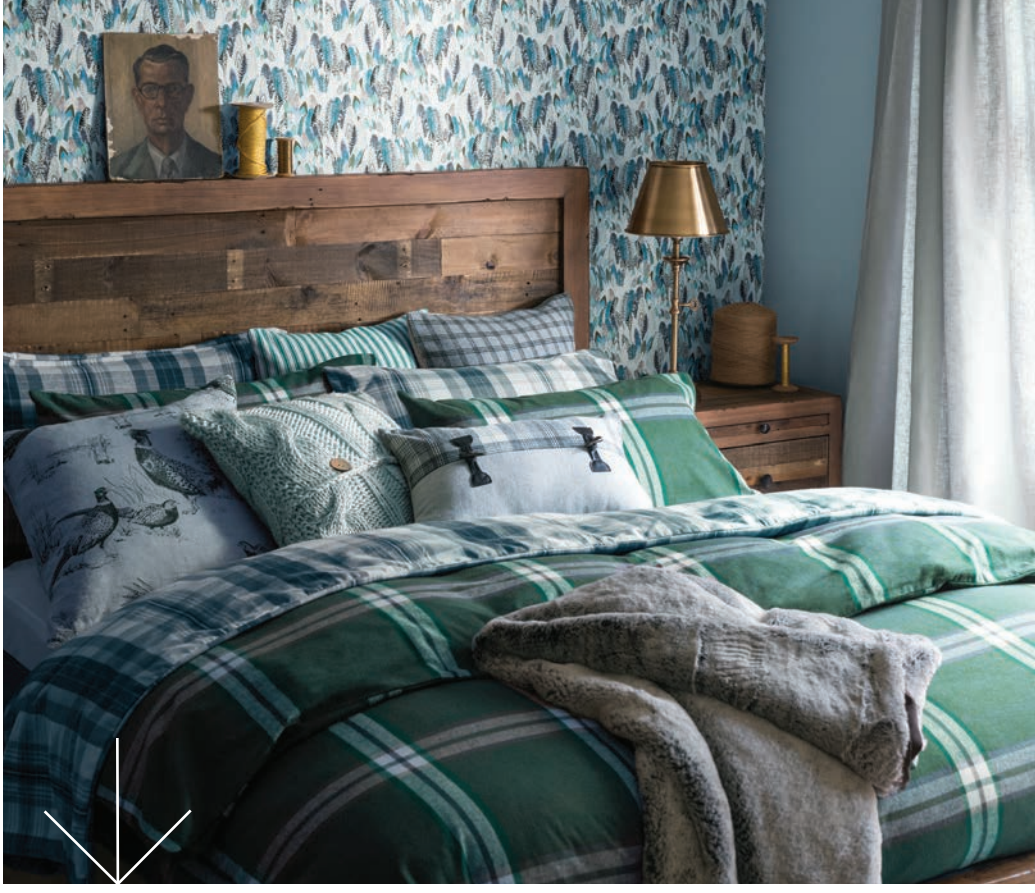
BEST INVERTER

Honda EU7000is with CO-MINDER
$5,000

for upgrades to everything from doors, windows, and insulation to heating systems and hot-water heaters. (Tankless models, for example, can be significantly more efficient.) So keep your eyes open for local, state, and federal incentive programs.

Notably, under the recently approved Inflation Reduction Act (get details at whitehouse.gov/cleanenergy), you may be eligible for tax credits of $4,000 to $8,000 for cutting your energy use, depending on your income. For instance, you may be able to get $1,200 a year for insulation from January 2023 through 2032. An electric heat pump could get you up to $2,000 credited back, and the tax credit for putting in a solar energy system is up to 30 percent of eligible expenses. Plus, "you can even find zero percent financing for some upgrades," says Zarker of the Building Performance Institute.

Your utility company may also have ways to control your bill, such as level billing (which averages your costs over 12 months) and price locks (which hold costs at a set rate all season). But be aware that some utilities charge more for electricity use at peak times. Ask yours so that you can determine when you can use appliances most economically.



7 Heat-Saving Lifestyle Hacks

WITH HEATING COSTS threatening to hit new highs this winter, these small changes to your home and your habits can help you stay toasty–and on budget–in the months ahead. You don't have to try them all, but each will pare bills or improve comfort.

Lower your thermostat.

The DOE recommends turning thermostats down 7 to 10 degrees when you're not at home and at bedtime to save up to 10 percent ($90) per year on an average heating bill. And consider a smart thermostat. "A smart thermostat can automatically adjust to your habits and changing weather via sensors," says Rebecca Foster, CEO of VEIC, which administers energy efficiency programs, "so it does the work of optimizing performance for you." These typically cost $100 to $300 but can save you another 8 percent on heating and cooling bills per year. As for your water heater, lowering it from 140° to 120° F and cutting 8-minute showers in half could save $168 a year.

CR'S TOP-RATED SMART THERMOSTATS

These let you control your home's heat remotely and can learn your preferences and whether you're home or away—and set the temperature accordingly.

83

Google Nest Learning Thermostat $250

74

Braeburn BlueLink 7320 $120

73

Honeywell Home T10 ProTHX321WFS $225

PHOTO, TOP: OTTO

POOR EXCELLENT | CR RECOMMENDED

$50 How much a smart thermostat that meets Energy Star criteria may save you on your heating and cooling bills each year.

Rethink fireplace use.

"I love a crackling fireplace," Zarker says. But unless it's properly maintained and used, a fireplace can send heating dollars up the chimney. (And because wood smoke can pose health risks, you may want to use fireplaces only occasionally.) Have your chimney inspected and cleaned yearly, and use a fireplace screen to contain sparks. Close the damper between uses, and consider a chimney liner as well as tempered glass doors and a fireplace heat exchanger, which warms air and sends it back into the room. Another idea: Apply sealant and weather stripping around the chimney to reduce air leakage by 14 percent or more. If you're not firing up your fireplace at all, a fireplace plug (about $60) may be wise.

Dress windows well.

Insulated cellular shades and thermal curtains can cut the amount of heat you lose through windows by 40 percent or more. Hang curtains close to the panes and let them to drop to the floor or windowsill to further block drafts. Keep shades up and curtains open during the day to capture heat from the sun.

Flip ceiling fans.

Reverse your ceiling fan's rotation so that it runs clockwise. This helps to push any warm air that has risen to the ceiling down toward you.

Capture cooking heat.

Done making dinner? Turn off the oven but leave its door open, says Christine Ciavardini of MD Energy Advisors, and let the residual heat warm up your home. You've paid for it.

Cozy up your bed.

Flannel sheets have fluffy, raised fibers that become heat-trapping pockets. Top them with a wool, fleece, down, or down-alternative blanket, and run a hot water bottle or soapstone bed warmer ($47.50 to $57.50 from the Vermont Soapstone Co.) between the sheets before climbing in.

Layer up at home.

Instead of turning up the thermostat when you feel a chill, dress in layers you can put on and take off as needed. Start with a close-fitting top and bottom of performance material (think workout wear or long underwear), which helps lock in body heat, add fleece-lined slipper socks, and top with a wool sweater or fleece-lined sweatshirt.

SHOULD YOU USE A PORTABLE HEATER? Portable and wall-mounted electrical heaters usually aren't an energy-smart option for regular use. But they can be helpful for occasional use if you've lowered your thermostat or your main heat source is down. Avoid kerosene and gas models, which can emit carbon monoxide, except in emergencies.

Stay Safer in Ice and Snow

- Put ice melt outside your doorways and on walkways before a storm hits. Do it again once snow is falling, but stay inside if it's sleeting.
- Before stepping outside, layer up in wool or silk. (Both hold in warmth better than, say, cotton.) Cover extremities, which get chilled fastest. That means putting on a hat and gloves, along with warm boots.
- In snowy, icy zones, it's wise to have boots with "Arctic Grip" (tiny, spiky fibers) or "Green Diamond" (akin to sandpaper) soles. Or try slip-on ice cleats or microspikes, which provide traction. Four offered excellent grip on ice in CR tests: Kahtoolas, Sportneers, Stabils, and Yatta. Yaktrax didn't perform as well.
- Waddle when you walk to prevent slipping. Take short steps or shuffle with your feet flat and slightly pointed out and wider apart than usual. Bend slightly forward at your waist.
- Always have a charged phone with you in case you fall and need to call for help.

WHAT YOU MUST KNOW ABOUT **MEDICARE**

Popular Advantage plans come with some risks. Here's how to weigh your options.

by **PENNY WANG** Illustrations by **BEN SHMULEVITCH**

e.

If

you're one of the 64 million Americans enrolled in Medicare, you know that the deluge has begun. In your mailbox and on TV, you're being inundated with ads for Medicare Advantage plans, star-powered by the likes of William Shatner, all promising great care with low- or zero-cost premiums.

This marketing tsunami is timed to Medicare open enrollment, which runs from Oct. 15 to Dec. 7. That's when you can switch coverage between Original Medicare and Medicare Advantage, or change your prescription drug plan.

The pitches work: In 2022 nearly half of those eligible for Medicare were enrolled in Advantage plans, up from about a third in 2016, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. By 2032 about 60 percent of beneficiaries are expected to sign up for these plans.

It's easy to see the appeal: Original Medicare requires piecing together care from what is called Part A, for in-patient hospital and skilled nursing care, and Part B, for doctor services. That typically costs about $165 a month (with the cost deducted from your Social Security check). Plus, many people pay extra for Medigap, to cover copays and other out-of-pocket costs, as well as a Part D plan, for drugs.

Advantage plans (also called Part C), on the other hand, provide the benefits of Parts A, B, and often D, usually for about the same amount, with lower copays, so there is no need for Medigap. Some also offer benefits not in Original Medicare, such as fitness classes or some vision and dental care.

Sounds good—but be wary. Choosing between the two requires careful consideration of your finances and health needs. And Advantage plans can carry hidden risks, especially for people with major health issues.

"Some people in Medicare Advantage end up paying unexpectedly high costs when they become ill or find their network lacks the providers they need," says Tricia Neuman, senior vice president at Kaiser.

WHEN ADVANTAGE PLANS FALL SHORT

For many seniors, Advantage plans can work well. A 2021 study in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that Advantage enrollees often receive more preventive care than those in traditional Medicare.

But if you have chronic conditions or significant health needs, you may want to think twice. For one thing, with Original Medicare you can see any provider that accepts Medicare, which is most of them.

But Advantage plans typically require that you get care from a more limited network of providers, and you may need pre-authorization to see specialists, says Melinda Caughill, co-founder of 65 Incorporated, a firm that provides Medicare enrollment guidance.

"It's a riskier approach to health care," Caughill says, that can also end up being more expensive.

For example, a recent Kaiser study found that about half of all Medicare Advantage enrollees would end up paying more than those in traditional Medicare for a seven-day hospital stay.

Advantage plans may be especially problematic for people in rural areas, says David Meyers, PhD, at Brown University in Rhode Island. A 2021 study he co-authored found that rural Advantage plan enrollees were nearly twice as likely to switch to Original Medicare as those in urban or suburban areas, possibly because the network of providers in rural areas is especially narrow, making it harder for enrollees to make appointments and get care.

WHAT TO DO

Start researching your options several months before you first sign up for Medicare, or before your open enrollment period, says Julie Carter, at the Medicare Rights Center. Start with these steps:

1 Assess your current coverage.

If you're already enrolled in Medicare, you've probably received an "annual notice of change" letter, which details any changes in your plan's benefits. Call your insurer or visit the plan website if you've misplaced that letter.

With Medicare Advantage plans, you could see changes in the doctors and hospitals included in their networks from year to year, so call your providers and ask whether they will remain in the network next year.

There may also be changes to the plan's vision and dental coverage, as well as the prescription drugs it covers, says Danielle Roberts, co-founder of Boomer Benefits, a Medicare insurance broker.

2 Compare all out-of-pocket costs.

One portion of your expenses will be the monthly premium costs: This is when Medicare Advantage can look inexpensive. That's why you need to dig deeper to fully understand your potential out-of-pocket costs, says Caughill of 65 Incorporated. Those can include copays as well as coinsurance, or a percentage of your total bill.

"If you have a chronic condition, and you have to pay 20 percent in coinsurance for each visit, you might spend thousands of dollars, which will more than offset any savings in premiums," Caughill says.

So examine your benefits statements and medical bills for the past year, then add up what you paid in deductibles and copays to get the true costs of your plan. Then consider what you might pay the following year, if you need, say, a knee replacement or have an accident. For many people, opting for Original Medicare plus a Medigap plan offers more financial security.

3 Consider the consequences of switching.

When you initially enroll in Medicare at age 65, you have a guaranteed right to purchase a Medigap plan. And insurers are required to renew coverage each year as long as you continue to pay your premiums. But if you try to buy a Medigap policy after that enrollment window, insurers in many states may be able to turn you down or charge you more due to a preexisting condition, says Roberts of Boomer Benefits.

There are exceptions. Connecticut, New York, and a few other states provide greater protections. And if you opt for an Advantage plan when you first enroll, you generally have a 12-month trial period when you can switch to Original Medicare and have guaranteed access to a Medigap plan.

How to Save on a Part D Rx Drug Plan

Protection from accelerating drug costs is finally coming to people on Medicare, thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, signed into law by President Biden earlier this year.

THE BIGGEST CHANGES FOR 2023? Vaccinations will be free, including the shingles vaccine, and insulin won't cost more than $35 a month. The new law also keeps the lid on other medication costs because drugmakers will be penalized for price hikes that are more than the rate of inflation.

Another huge benefit—a $2,000 annual out-of-pocket cap for medications—doesn't begin until 2025. (In 2024 the cap will be $3,500.)

Meanwhile, to really save at the pharmacy, there are still important steps to take during Medicare open enrollment.

+ Check your present plan or shop for a new one. You may be happy with your existing plan. But because details can change year to year—including the level of coverage for the drugs you take—you need to check your plan against others, says Jack Hoadley, PhD, research professor emeritus at the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. To do this, use the comparison tool at medicare.gov/plan-compare.

Skipping this step could cost you. People who stay on the same plan as last year—as nearly 7 in 10 do—could spend hundreds extra a year, says Frederic Riccardi, president of the nonprofit MedicareRights.org.

+ Look for "preferred pharmacies." It's not enough that a pharmacy accepts your plan. In 2021, CR conducted a pricing spot-check of five generic drugs. We saved $511 using a pharmacy that one plan listed as "preferred," compared with another pharmacy that accepted the same plan but wasn't preferred.

When using the medicare.gov tool, after you've entered your medications and ZIP code and selected up to five pharmacies to compare prices, look for the green "Preferred" bar next to them. You can add or remove stores to keep comparing, or search using the map function.

+ Love your local pharmacy? Ask which plans it accepts. Small-town drugstores want to keep your business and may take the time to help find a low-cost plan they take for the drugs you need, says Doug Hoey, CEO of the National Community Pharmacists Association.

+ Check whether you qualify for Medicare Extra Help. If your annual income is expected to be below $20,385 in 2023 (individual) with assets (not including your home, car, life insurance policies, or burial plots) of up to $15,510, you may qualify. The same goes for couples with less than $27,465 in income and $30,950 in assets.

+ Make a call. For free help, contact Medicare Rights (800-333-4114) or your state Health Insurance Assistance Program (call 877-839-2675 to locate). More questions? Call Medicare directly, at 800-633-4227.

—Lisa L. Gill

Original Medicare vs. Medicare Advantage

When choosing between an Advantage plan and Original Medicare plus Medigap and a stand-alone prescription drug plan, you need to take into account how much healthcare you expect you will need in the coming year in order to determine your anticipated costs.

Original Medicare: Parts A & B	Medigap	Medicare Part D	Medicare Advantage: Part C
WHAT IT COVERS			
Part A: In-patient hospital and skilled nursing care. **Part B:** Doctor services at any provider that takes Medicare. *Vision, dental, and hearing usually not covered, so paid out of pocket.*	Most plans cover all out-of-pocket costs for parts A and B, including coinsurance. Not available to people in Medicare Advantage.	Prescription drugs.	Most medical care, usually including drugs and often vision, dental, and hearing.
WHAT IT COSTS MONTHLY			
Part A: **$0**[1] + **Part B:** **$165** + copays and coinsurance *higher earners pay more*	**$178**[2]	**$22**[2] + copays and coinsurance *higher earners pay more*	**$18** + **$165** for Medicare Part B + copays and coinsurance *higher earners pay more*
ANNUAL AVERAGE DEDUCTIBLE			
Part A: $1,600 *generally covered by Medigap* **Part B:** $226	$181[2]	$427[2]	$121[2]
OUT-OF-POCKET MAXIMUM			
There is no out-of-pocket maximum.	Medigap plans cover nearly all out-of-pocket costs for parts A and B.	$4,660[3]	$8,300 in-network care; $12,450 in- and out-of-network care combined.
BEST FOR			
Adults with known health issues who prefer not needing a doctor referral, and who want access to wide doctor and hospital networks.	People in Original Medicare who have existing health issues or want more predictable healthcare costs.	Everyone, even if you don't presently require prescriptions.	Healthy adults who prefer low premiums and are comfortable with managed care and the need for referrals.

[1] Part A is free for those who paid Social Security taxes for 10 years. [2] Average for 2022 based on eHealth estimates. [3] After this you enter the "doughnut hole," when you pay up to 25 percent of drug costs until you reach $7,400, and then generally pay 5 percent. **Sources:** CMS and Kaiser Family Foundation.

4 For more information ...

When you're ready to start reviewing plans, check out the Medicare plan finder tool (medicare.gov/plan-compare), which will let you compare Medicare Advantage and Part D prescription drug plans available in your area. You can also get this information by calling Medicare at 800-633-4227.

If you're looking for a Medigap plan, you can also start at medicare.gov, where you can compare the different types of coverage, as well as find the policies available in your ZIP code.

Another good resource is the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), which provides free guidance over the phone. To find your state's program, go to shiphelp.org or call 877-839-2675.

Low-income seniors (limits vary by state) may be able to get help with costs through Medicare Savings Programs. For eligibility information, search for "help paying costs" at medicare.gov, or call your state's SHIP program.

When you've made your selection, enroll in your new plan by calling Medicare at 800-633-4227, if you're looking to switch to Original Medicare, or by calling the insurer or an independent Medicare broker who offers products from multiple companies. (Be sure to keep detailed notes of your phone conversation with the representative in case any problems emerge later on.)

Or, if you determine that your current plan is still the best one, just sit tight. You'll be re-enrolled in that plan automatically at the start of the year.

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

FIRST DRIVE

Nissan Z

While the Z sports car has been reincarnated with an all-new design, its 400-hp twin-turbocharged V6 is borrowed from Infiniti and its automatic transmission is truck-sourced. It competes directly with another iconic two-seater Japanese sports car, the Toyota Supra.
CR'S TAKE: The rear-drive Z is a highly rewarding, enthusiast-focused machine that's a treat on twisty roads. The engine is the star, delivering smooth, readily available power and a roar that gets noticed.

BASE PRICE RANGE $39,990-$52,990
DESTINATION CHARGE $1,025
PRICE AS DRIVEN $53,210

PHOTO: NISSAN

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

GM Expands Super Cruise Coverage

General Motors' Super Cruise, technology that lets you **drive hands-free** on pre-mapped highways, is **doubling the number of roads** the system will recognize to 400,000 miles by the end of this year. Currently available on eight GM vehicles—the Cadillac Escalade, CT4, CT5, and XT6; the GMC Hummer EV and Sierra 1500; and the Chevrolet Bolt EUV and Silverado 1500—the update will automatically download to equipped cars at no charge. By the end of 2023, 22 GM models will have Super Cruise.

ASK OUR EXPERTS

Could the price of a car you ordered increase before you pick it up?

The paperwork is key. The answer depends on whether you merely put down a deposit on a vehicle without signing an agreement or if you signed a purchase agreement, also known as a contract. If you just put down a deposit, the final price isn't carved in stone and the dealer can increase it. And there may be valid reasons for rising costs. But a purchase agreement signed by you and the dealership is a binding contract. If it does try to change the price, hold firm: The law is on your side. The dealership may try to sell you pricey extras, such as nitrogen-filled tires or an extended warranty, to make more money on the sale. Don't bite on those offers.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

932,329

The number of cars stolen in the U.S. last year, a 17 percent increase over 2019. Consumers should consider buying cars with engine-immobilizer systems that prevent them from being hot-wired by someone who doesn't have the key. Even a steering wheel lock, while cumbersome, is an effective theft deterrent.

Source: The National Insurance Crime Bureau

RECALL

Ford

The Ford Motor Company is recalling almost 200,000 Ford Expedition and Lincoln Navigator SUVs from the 2015 through 2017 model years because a faulty component in the heating and cooling system could cause an interior fire when the vehicle is running. This risk isn't related to the underhood fire recall issued previously for 2021 Expeditions and Navigators.
WHAT TO DO: Ford and Lincoln dealerships will replace the existing front blower motor assembly free of charge. Call Ford at 866-436-7332 for more information.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

SLEET, SNOW, ICE:

How to Drive in Bad Weather

Expert advice for tackling the toughest driving conditions, plus the best tires for the traction and performance you need.

ABOUT 1 IN 5 car crashes each year are related to bad weather such as rain or snow, according to the Federal Highway Administration. Precipitation reduces visibility—your ability to see as well as to be seen—and makes roads slippery, reducing tire traction. On average, almost 5,000 people are killed and more than 418,000 injured a year in weather-related crashes—numbers that could grow because heavy storms are becoming much more common across the U.S., according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

But with the right combination of caution, preparation, and know-how, many of these crashes are avoidable.

Of course, your best bet when the weather is bad is to refrain from driving in the first place. But if driving is unavoidable, you'll want to make sure your car is equipped with what are among the most important pieces of safety equipment you can buy: good tires designed for the specific weather challenges you're likely to face. "Your car's tires are its only points of contact with the road, so having highly rated ones that are appropriate for the conditions where you live is important," says Ryan Pszczolkowski, manager of CR's tire program.

But if snow, ice, rain, or sleet is bad enough, even a car fitted with the top-rated, season-appropriate tires—or with all-wheel or four-wheel drive, for that matter—might not be enough to keep you from losing control. Driver skill matters, too, such as knowing what to do when you hydroplane or approach an icy hill.

Here we provide an all-in-one guide to help you drive more safely in bad weather, with tire recommendations and tips on how to handle your car in the most tricky situations.

TIPS FOR DRIVING IN

Clear Sensors and Cameras

In cars equipped with automatic emergency braking or other active safety and driver assistance features, be sure to clean ice, mud, slush, and snow off the sensors and cameras they use to function. Most are located in the bumpers, fenders, and grille, and often at the top of the windshield.

Steer and Brake Gently

Hard braking and sharp turns can cause tires to lose traction when the road gets slippery, so brake gradually, before turning, and make sure your turns are slow and smooth.

TREACHEROUS CONDITIONS

Use Defrost on 'Auto'

Turn your climate system to automatic (if you have it) or press the Defrost button. The key here is to let the car figure out how to best balance removing moisture and adding heat or cooling.

Slow Down

Limit your speed in foul weather, and avoid unnecessary lane changes and sharp turns. Both can cause your tires to lose traction and the vehicle to skid or hydroplane.

Maintain Steady Speed on Slippery Hills

Abruptly speeding up or slowing down can cause tires to lose grip on a surface made slick by rain, snow, or ice—especially on a hill.

Use Caution on Newly Wet Roads

When it hasn't rained or snowed in a while, precipitation can bring oil, debris, and grime to the road surface, making it extra slippery.

Turn Into a Skid

If your car begins a skid, slow down and avoid braking. Steer in the direction you want the car to go. This will help the tires regain traction.

Drive With Headlights On

In foul weather, you want the headlights on to help you see and be visible to others—even during the day. Don't rely on daytime running lights.

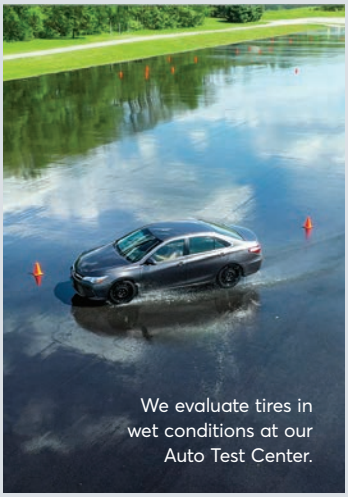
ILLUSTRATION BY GUILHERME HENRIQUE

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TIRES

Good tires designed for the specific weather conditions where you live are among the most important car safety items you can buy. Although tires may all look similar, there are several types.

- **All-season tires** are the best choice for most drivers. They perform well in the widest variety of weather conditions and are suitable for light winter snow. You do not need to switch these tires seasonally.
- **Winter/snow tires** are a smart choice for people who live in places where heavy winter snowfall is common. Designed for seasonal use, they have specially designed treads and tiny grooves that aid snow traction.
- **All-weather tires** split the difference. These are essentially all-season tires with enhanced snow and ice traction. They are good for drivers in snowy areas who don't want to have to switch tires.

To see how tires measure up, we buy hundreds each year and evaluate them at our Auto Test Center. In addition to performing snow-traction tests, we evaluate them for handling and braking in wet, dry, and icy conditions, and perform treadwear tests after driving tires 16,000 miles on public roads. We project tread life from those results. Our predictions are based on actual miles driven, not government ratings or manufacturers' warranties.



We evaluate tires in wet conditions at our Auto Test Center.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Three-Season Driving				Winter Driving		Comfort		Other	
			Dry braking	Wet braking	Handling	Hydroplaning resistance	Snow traction	Ice braking	Ride	Noise	Rolling resistance	Tested tread life (miles)
ALL-SEASON TIRES												
✓ **Michelin** Defender T+H	67	$179	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	●	85,000
✓ **General** Altimax RT43	66	$129	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	●	70,000
Continental TrueContact Tour	63	$139	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	▼	70,000
Hankook Kinergy PT	63	$123	▲	▼	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	▲	85,000
BFGoodrich Advantage Control	62	$126	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▼	55,000
Firestone All Season	61	$104	▲	●	●	▲	▲	●	●	▲	▲▲	65,000
PERFORMANCE ALL-SEASON TIRES												
✓ **Michelin** CrossClimate2	74	$179	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	▼	85,000
✓ **Continental** PureContact LS	67	$142	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	●	75,000
✓ **Hankook** Kinergy 4S2	67	$129	▲	●	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	▲	55,000
✓ **General** Altimax 365 AW	66	$115	●	●	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	60,000
✓ **Vredestein** Quatrac Pro	66	$137	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	●	65,000
Nokian One	65	$123	▲	●	▲	▲	▲▲	●	●	▲	●	65,000
Goodyear WeatherReady	65	$170	●	●	▲	▲	▲▲	●	●	▲	●	70,000
Vredestein HiTrac	64	$142	▲	●	▲	▲	●	●	●	▲	●	70,000
Nexen N5000 Platinum	63	$116	▲	●	●	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	▲	55,000
Pirelli Cinturato P7 All Season Plus II	63	$130	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▼	●	▲▲	▲	60,000

PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

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Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Three-Season Driving				Winter Driving		Comfort		Other	
			Dry braking	Wet braking	Handling	Hydroplaning resistance	Snow traction	Ice braking	Ride	Noise	Rolling resistance	Tested tread life (miles)
ULTRA-HIGH-PERFORMANCE ALL-SEASON TIRES												
✓ **Michelin** Pilot Sport All Season 4	73	$189	⇈	^	^	⇈	^	!	v	⇈	⇊	60,000
✓ **BFGoodrich** g-Force Comp-2 A/S Plus	73	$159	⇈	^	⇈	^	^	^	v	^	v	60,000
✓ **Vredestein** Hypertrac All Season	70	$146	^	!	^	⇈	^	^	!	^	v	60,000
✓ **Continental** ExtremeContact DWS06 Plus	70	$158	⇈	^	^	⇈	^	^	!	!	⇊	60,000
Yokohama Advan Sport A/S+	67	$131	⇈	!	!	^	!	^	!	^	v	65,000
General G-Max AS05	65	$149	^	!	^	^	!	^	v	^	v	55,000
Goodyear Eagle Exhilarate	65	$183	^	^	^	⇈	^	!	v	^	⇊	40,000
Kumho Ecsta PA51	63	$140	^	!	^	⇈	!	!	v	^	⇊	50,000
Bridgestone Potenza RE980 Plus	63	$170	^	!	^	⇈	^	!	v	^	⇊	55,000
Cooper Zeon RS3-G1	63	$144	^	!	^	⇈	!	!	v	^	v	55,000
ALL-SEASON TRUCK TIRES												
✓ **Continental** TerrainContact HT	69	$166	^	!	^	!	⇈	NA	^	⇈	^	95,000
General Grabber HTS60	62	$166	^	!	!	^	^	NA	!	^	⇈	75,000
Michelin Defender LTX M/S	62	$229	!	v	!	^	⇈	NA	!	⇈	⇈	80,000
Laufenn X Fit HT	57	$157	^	v	!	^	^	NA	!	^	^	55,000
Kumho Crugen HT51	56	$139	^	v	!	^	^	NA	!	⇈	⇈	55,000
Bridgestone Dueler H/L Alenza Plus	55	$189	^	v	!	^	v	NA	!	^	^	65,000
Falken Wildpeak H/T02	54	$169	^	v	^	^	!	NA	!	^	!	45,000
Nokian Rotiiva HT	54	$177	^	⇊	^	^	!	NA	v	^	^	60,000
Firestone Destination LE3	54	$151	!	⇊	v	^	⇈	NA	^	⇈	⇈	60,000
Hankook Dynapro HT	54	$155	^	⇊	!	^	^	NA	v	^	^	60,000
ALL-SEASON SUV TIRES												
✓ **Michelin** CrossClimate SUV [1]	74	$206	⇈	^	^	^	⇈	NA	^	^	^	40,000
✓ **Vredestein** HiTrac	69	$169	^	!	^	^	⇈	NA	!	⇈	^	55,000
✓ **Goodyear** Assurance ComfortDrive	67	$199	^	^	^	^	!	NA	!	^	!	80,000
✓ **Kumho** Crugen HP71	66	$139	^	!	^	^	!	NA	^	⇈	^	55,000
Pirelli Scorpion Verde All Season Plus II	65	$169	^	!	^	^	^	NA	^	⇈	⇈	45,000
Falken Ziex CT60 A/S	65	$159	^	!	^	^	⇈	NA	!	⇈	⇈	60,000
Sumitomo HTR Enhance CX2	65	$146	^	!	^	^	^	NA	v	⇈	^	75,000
Continental CrossContact LX25	64	$169	^	!	!	^	^	NA	^	⇈	^	85,000
Michelin Defender LTX M/S	64	$191	!	!	^	^	⇈	NA	!	!	⇈	90,000
Atlas Force C/S	63	$90	^	!	^	^	^	NA	^	⇈	^	50,000

[1] All-weather tires.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Three-Season Driving				Winter Driving		Comfort		Other	
			Dry braking	Wet braking	Handling	Hydroplaning resistance	Snow traction	Ice braking	Ride	Noise	Rolling resistance	Tested tread life (miles)
WINTER/SNOW TIRES												
✓ **Bridgestone** Blizzak WS90	73	$131	⌃	⌄	I	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	I	I	NA
✓ **Michelin** X-Ice Snow	73	$177	I	⌄	⌄	I	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	I	⌃	⌃	NA
✓ **Continental** VikingContact 7	70	$139	I	⌄	⌄	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	NA
✓ **Hankook** Winter i*cept iZ2	69	$113	I	⌄	I	I	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	I	⌃⌃	NA
✓ **Goodyear** WinterCommand Ultra	69	$140	I	⌄	⌄	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	I	NA
✓ **General** Altimax Arctic 12	68	$122	I	⌄	⌄	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	I	⌃	I	NA
Nokian Nordman 7	64	$130	I	⌄⌄	⌄	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	I	⌄	I	NA
Nokian Hakkapeliitta R3	64	$177	I	⌄	⌄	I	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌄	⌃	NA
Toyo Observe GSi-6 HP	64	$113	I	⌄	⌄	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	I	⌃	I	NA
Yokohama iceGuard iG53	63	$137	I	⌄⌄	⌄	I	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	I	⌃⌃	NA
TRUCK WINTER/SNOW TIRES												
✓ **Michelin** Latitude X-Ice XI2	72	$189	I	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄	⌃⌃	NA	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	NA
✓ **Nexen** Winguard Winspike WS62 SUV	72	$128	I	⌄⌄	⌄	I	⌃⌃	NA	⌃	I	⌃⌃	NA
✓ **Nokian** Hakkapeliitta R3 SUV	71	$170	I	⌄⌄	⌄	I	⌃⌃	NA	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	NA
✓ **General** Grabber Arctic	70	$129	I	⌄⌄	⌄	⌃	⌃⌃	NA	⌃	⌃	⌃	NA
✓ **Bridgestone** Blizzak DM-V2	69	$169	I	⌄⌄	⌄	I	⌃⌃	NA	⌃	I	⌃	NA
Hankook i*Pike RW11	67	$166	I	⌄⌄	⌄	⌃	⌃⌃	NA	⌃	I	⌃	NA
Goodyear WinterCommand	66	$155	I	⌄⌄	⌄	I	⌃⌃	NA	I	⌄	I	NA
Firestone Winterforce 2 UV	65	$139	I	⌄⌄	⌄	⌃	⌃⌃	NA	I	⌃	⌃	NA
PERFORMANCE WINTER/SNOW TIRES												
✓ **Bridgestone** Blizzak LM005	75	$278	⌃	I	I	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	I	⌃	I	NA
✓ **Hankook** Winter i*cept Evo3	75	$203	I	I	I	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	I	⌃	⌄	NA
✓ **Vredestein** Wintrac Pro	74	$179	I	I	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌄	NA
✓ **Michelin** Pilot Alpin PA4	74	$229	I	I	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌄	NA
Falken Eurowinter HS01	71	$139	⌃	I	I	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	I	I	⌄	NA
Nexen Winguard Sport 2	70	$137	I	I	I	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	I	I	⌄	NA
Toyo Observe GSi-6 (V)	68	$191	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	I	I	NA

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/tires. Find the right tires for your car, SUV, or truck.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on about a dozen tests, with braking, handling, and hydroplaning resistance more heavily weighted for many tires. **Braking** tests on ice are from 10 mph; on dry and wet pavement, from 60 to 0 mph. **Handling** combines how well a tire performed in the wet-handling test, steering feel, and an emergency handling maneuver. **Hydroplaning resistance** denotes a tire's ability to resist skimming along the surface of standing water. **Snow traction** tests denote how far a vehicle has to travel to accelerate from 5 to 20 mph on moderately packed snow. **Ride** and **noise** are evaluated subjectively on rough and smooth roads. **Rolling resistance,** as measured by a dynamometer, is a factor in fuel economy. **Tested tread life** is projected from a 16,000-mile vehicle test run on public roads in Texas for many tires. **Price** is approximate retail.

⌄⌄ ⌄ I ⌃ ⌃⌃ WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED

Should You Buy Your Leased Car?

IF YOU'RE NEARING the end of your lease, consider purchasing the vehicle from your leasing company. Most contracts include a provision to buy the vehicle at a price that was calculated at the start of the lease. It's usually not such a good deal, but with new and used cars in short supply and used-car prices in particular at all-time highs, the buyout price might save you significant money over buying or leasing a replacement. You could even make money if you then sell it to a third party. "The companies that drew up leasing contracts a few years ago likely didn't realize how much used cars would be worth today," says Jake Fisher, senior director of Consumer Reports' Auto Test Center. "That means they already agreed to sell you a car for far less than what it's worth today."

The guidance below will help you decide the move that's right for you.

Carefully Review Your Lease Terms

All of your options are dictated by your lease contract, so you need to review it closely.
WHAT TO DO: Make sure your lease allows you to buy the car (most do). Also note the buyout price (the non-negotiable price to buy the car) and any other charges. The total of these is what you'll pay for the car, plus any applicable taxes and fees. Subtract that amount from the car's estimated value to see how much you'd make if you sold it after buying it.
REMEMBER: The contract may permit you to sell it directly to a third party and avoid sales tax and fees, although some leases no longer allow this.

Get an Estimate of the Car's Value

To find out if your used car is worth more than what it will cost you to buy it from the leasing company (and the price you're likely to get if you decide to sell it after you buy it), you'll need to get an estimate of its resale value.
WHAT TO DO: You can use CR's Car Value Estimator (CR.org/tradein) or other online platforms or apps, such as CarMax, CoPilot, and Kelley Blue Book.
REMEMBER: The online estimate is a starting point. For an even fuller view of the high- and low-end value of your car, take it to a couple of local used-car lots to find out what they'd be willing to pay you for it.

If the Car's Value Is High

If your car is worth a lot more than the cost to buy it, you have a couple of options.
WHAT TO DO: You could purchase it and be satisfied knowing you bought below-market and have equity in the vehicle. You could also sell the car to companies like CarMax or Carvana, sell it yourself, or use it as a trade-in on a new-car purchase. (Selling it yourself can often get you a higher price.)
REMEMBER: If you decide to sell, be sure to factor in the sales tax, registration, and other fees to see if you'll still come out ahead. Even on used cars, the sales tax can be $1,000 or more, depending on state tax rates.

When to Consider Another Lease

If the buyout price isn't much lower than the car's market value, or if you're just not interested in buying your car, you might choose the ease of rolling into another lease.
WHAT TO DO: While incentives aren't as common these days as they once were, you can still find deals if you're willing to look at less sought-after models like small sedans and front-wheel-drive SUVs.
REMEMBER: Buying costs less in the long run, but the monthly expense of a car that's leased tends to be lower than on one that's financed. A lease can keep your monthly payments low until the market cools and you can reassess your options.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

ROAD TEST

LUXURY ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Genesis GV60

Fun-to-Drive Luxury EV

80
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 91

HIGHS Comfortable ride, sharp handling, quiet cabin, high-quality fit and finish, no tailpipe emissions

LOWS Restricted rear and side visibility

POWERTRAIN 314-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct-drive transmission; all-wheel drive

RANGE 248 miles

PRICE $58,890-$67,890 base price + $1,095 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $60,220

THE GV60 IS one of the nicest-driving EVs available. We found this SUV-like hatchback to be quick, quiet, comfortable, and agile. It also takes less time than most EVs to recharge at public DC fast-charging locations: A 20-minute session can bring the battery from near-empty to 80 percent–a big advantage on a long road trip.

Acceleration is smooth and rapid, which makes it feel effortless anytime you need a prompt burst of speed. The car's sharp handling stems from its responsive steering, low-mounted battery pack, and rear-biased power distribution, which together make the GV60 satisfying to take through turns. Yet the suspension absorbs most bumps well, serving up a steady and composed ride that befits its luxury-car status.

The handsomely finished interior includes some interesting details, such as the "crystal sphere" on the center console. Turn the car on and the orb flips over to reveal a rotary gear selector knob.

We appreciate that the "floating" center console frees up right-knee space, but the steering-wheel rim hides the top portion of the instrument panel from view for some drivers. The front seats are a good marriage between comfort and support; the rear seat is snug on headroom.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results												Active Safety Features			
		Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Range, miles	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	Cargo volume, cu. ft.	FCW	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW
ELECTRIC VEHICLES $45,000-$65,000																			
Ford Mustang Mach-E	82	▲	▲▲	78	270	▲ / ▲	●	▲▲	●	▲	▲▲	52.0	5.3	136	29.5	S	S	S	S
Genesis GV60	80	●	▲	91	248	▲ / ▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	54.5	5.1	131	26.5	S	S	S	S
Hyundai Ioniq 5	80	●	▲	91	256	▲ / ▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	53.0	4.7	131	28.5	S	S	S	S
Kia EV6	79	●	▲	90	274	▲ / ●	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	54.5	4.7	126	26.5	S	S	S	S
Tesla Model Y	59	▼▼	▲▲	90	316	▲▲ / ▲	▼▼	▲	▼	▲	▲▲	54.5	4.7	121	25.0	S	S	S	–
Volkswagen ID.4	59	▼	▲▲	83	240	▲▲ / ▲	▼▼	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	52.5	5.8	134	31.0	S	S	S	S

HOW WE TEST: Recommended models did well in our **Overall Score,** which factors in **road-test results, predicted reliability, owner satisfaction,** and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, and blind spot warning. A dash (–) means no such safety system is offered; O means that it's optional on at least some trim levels; S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes to prevent the vehicle from rolling away.

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **FCW** forward collision warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

EXCLUSIVE RATINGS & REVIEWS
BASED ON TESTING AT CR'S
327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER

MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCKS

Rivian R1T

Quick, Capable, and Innovative Electric Pickup

67
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 87

HIGHS Acceleration, handling, quietness, creative storage spaces, no tailpipe emissions

LOWS Intrusive regenerative braking, unintuitive controls, awkward exterior door handles

POWERTRAIN 835-hp, four electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; AWD

RANGE 314 miles

PRICE $73,000-$85,000 base price + $1,500 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $74,500

THE R1T IS a cutting-edge, all-electric pickup truck with an impressively wide repertoire of capabilities. About the size of a Honda Ridgeline but with double the maximum towing capacity, it has a luxurious cabin and features numerous innovations, including a transverse storage tunnel between the cab and bed. But it takes concentration to drive the R1T smoothly, and the controls are poorly executed.

With 835 hp, the R1T scorched from 0 to 60 mph in a sports-car-like 3.8 seconds. Stopping distances are merely average, though, begging the question of whether the R1T is too speedy for its own good. We found the regenerative braking system annoying; it doesn't have a coast mode like most EVs. Anytime you let off the throttle, the R1T slows down abruptly, which can make passengers feel queasy.

The R1T's handling abilities are impressive for any vehicle, let alone a nearly 7,000-pound pickup, thanks to quick steering and very little body roll through corners. The ride is steady and composed–unlike most pickups.

But we don't like Rivian's over-reliance on the center infotainment screen for common tasks, or the lack of easy-to-use physical controls for the side mirrors, steering-wheel adjustment, and dashboard air vents.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results												Active Safety Features			
		Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	Cargo volume, cu. ft.	FCW	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW
PICKUP TRUCKS $40,000-$75,000																			
✓ **Honda Ridgeline** 3.5L	82	^	^^	83	20	^ /	^	^	^	^		53.5	7.3	134	NR	S	S	S	O
✓ **Ram 1500** 5.7L	75		^	83	17	^ / ^^	^	^^	^			47.5	7.1	137	NR	O	O	O	O
✓ **Toyota Tundra** 3.5T	71		^	71	17	^ / ^^	^	^			v	48.0	6.3	140	NR	S	S	S	O
Rivian R1T E	67	v	^^	87	70 [1]	^ / ^	vv	^	^	^	^	52.5	3.8	135	NR	S	S	S	S
Ford F-150 3.5T+H	62	v	^	79	20	^ / ^^	^	^^			v	48.0	6.3	141	NR	S	S	S	O
Chevrolet Silverado 1500 5.3L	46	vv		78	17	/ ^^	^	^				49.5	6.9	136	NR	S	S	O	O

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

vv v | ^ ^^ WORSE – BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

[1] Miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGe).

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Some Seasonal Snafus

The holiday fare below just isn't the right kind of festive.

Gift Giving Has Reached a New Bottom
Although this present is definitely something everyone needs.
Submitted by Gary Woodhouse, Layton, UT

Smells Like ... Nothing?
Don't expect any aromatherapy from this bar of soap.
Submitted by Tom Pastore, Bloomfield Hills, MI

for
Aromatherapy Soap
UNscented
Contains organic olive oil, kosher glycerin, purified water, high-fat goat milk, herbal infusions, botanicals, plant colorings or mica, Vit.E, essential oils.
4 oz.

Something Isn't Kosher Here
Maybe this ham would be better for Easter.
Submitted by Jerry Goffe, Albuquerque, NM

Only for Those on the Naughty List
Kids everywhere hope you'll shop in a different section.
Submitted by Mike H. as seen in Topeka, KS

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